J.G. Frazer and the Platonic Theory of Being

Thomas Yaeger

J.G. Frazer and the Platonic Theory of Being

Thomas Yaeger

J.G. Frazer and the Platonic Theory of Being

Thomas Yaeger

Published by the Anshar Press

via Smashwords

ISBN: 9781310105470

Title: J. G. Frazer and the Platonic Theory of Being

Author: Thomas Yaeger

http://theshrineinthesea.blogspot.co.uk

First eBook publication March 2016

Copyright Thomas Yaeger, 2016

Thomas Yaeger asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

Contents

Foreword 2016

Foreword 1999

Section One

Section Two

Section Three

Section Four

Section Five

Section Six

Section Seven

Section Eight

Section Nine

Section Ten

Section Eleven

Section Twelve

Section Thirteen

Section Fourteen

Section Fifteen

Section Sixteen

Summary of the Argument

Conclusion

Select Bibliography

Notes

Foreword 2016

This essay was available via my web pages from New Year's Day 1999 up until 2005, when I left Bath. The statistics files survive, and show that quite a lot of people looked at it. But there was little comment on the essay at the time.

Though it addresses the views of J.G. Frazer on Plato, and in particular how Frazer understood Plato's ontology and the nature of the Platonic Forms, it also seeks to show that Frazer's major study of myth, folklore, and magic, *The Golden Bough*, is illuminated by the study of his prize winning essay of 1879, *The Growth of Plato's Ideal Theory*, which remained unpublished until 1930.

In the 1980s I had read the two volume version of *The Golden Bough*, miraculously reduced from thirteen volumes by the expedient of removing all the footnotes, and, as I mentioned in my original foreword to the essay, was struck by the absence of any discussion of a relationship between magical patterns of thought and ideas of divinity and Being. I knew about the existence of this relationship principally from an interest in Platonism in the European Renaissance. But there was a puzzling absence of discussion of these ideas. In *The Golden Bough*, patterns of magical thought are discussed in terms of the *association of ideas*; as a phenomenon of human thought, rather than as something which is a corollary of a model of reality.

Frazer was a disciple of John Locke, who originated the idea of the association of ideas, and he understood the functioning of the human mind in such terms. His criticism of Plato is largely along the lines that, since he did not have this understanding of the way the human mind works, he mistakenly converted an epistemology into an ontology. Since having the capacity to think of a thing and give it a name, does not give it reality, Plato had made a fundamental error.

Frazer also shared Locke's interest in the progress of man, and imagined that the technical and industrial production of the British Empire represented how far the human race had come. Philosophy for Frazer was about practical things. It is clear in the text of *The Golden Bough* that the

idea of progress was seen by him in two ways - he drew a parallel between the gulf between the ideas of the ancients and of modern man, and the social and intellectual conditions in contemporary society, where the intellectual difference between those at the top and those at the bottom was likely to be just as great. In both cases, we should find frightful things, if we dig down deep.

Finding and providing explanations for both the existence and the nature of those frightful things was a major part of his work. He wanted to put unbridgeable distance between ourselves, the inheritors of enlightenment rationalism, and the ancient cultures whose ways of understanding the world were based on intellectual error. And that intellectual error he in part explained in *The Golden Bough*, treating magical thought entirely in terms of ideas of sympathy and contagion, or the faulty association of ideas in the ancient mind.

Did Frazer not know about the relationship between magic and the idea of Being? He was extremely well read, as his work testifies, so this is hard to believe. He ought to have noticed the crucial passage in Plato's *Laws* (XI, 933), where Plato clearly distinguishes between two levels of magic, and the penalties for each:

> ...it is not easy to know the nature of all these things; nor if a man do know can he readily persuade others to believe him. And when men are disturbed in their minds at the sight of waxen images fixed either at their doors, or in a place where three ways meet, or upon the sepulchres of parents, there is no use trying to persuade them that they should despise all such things because they have no certain knowledge about them... he who attempts to... enchant others knows not what he is doing... unless he happens to be a prophet or diviner.

Leaving out of *The Golden Bough* any consideration of the idea of magic as something whose nature depended on the nature of Being was a choice he made. It was not a choice forced on him by the evidence.

In writing *The Golden Bough* Frazer was transforming ancient thought about the world and its underlying reality into examples of intellectual

error, and by the parallels he made with ‘savage’ thought, through his definition of magic, he sealed the case against much of the thought of the ancient world. Frazer did this by writing a thirteen volume denial that magic *had ever been* an idea associated with the idea of Being. Though the elephant in the room (Being) was never directly discussed.

The agenda of the classicists from the outset of the (mainly German) professionalization of the discipline in the middle of the eighteenth century, was, in part, to recast the significance of classical Greece, and classical thought. This meant a purification of the realities in classical Greece, where idols were worshipped, animals were sacrificed, and magic was practised. None of these things were at the edge of Greek society: they were at the centre, and their importance and usefulness were generally taken for granted.

This purification meant therefore a degree of fabrication, a falsification of the actual nature of classical Greece. Aspects of the history of this falsification were discussed in Martin Bernal’s *Black Athena* of 1987, which had the word ‘fabrication’ in the subtitle. A large number of features of classical civilization could not be outright denied, since they were very common in the body of evidence. The worship of divine statues could not be questioned or denied; sacrifice was a regular feature of importance in public and private life, performed at every important juncture. Magic likewise, was a feature of ancient life at all levels of society.

However classical civilization could be purified in part by changing the interpretation of how these things came to have significance to the ancient Greeks. The answer was plain: the Greeks were prone to a degree of irrationality in their public and private lives. So, the divine statue of a god as a place inhabited by the divine was a mistake, possibly the result of failing to distinguish between the image of a thing, and the thing itself. The idea of the reality of the plethora of gods themselves was also a mistake, where the Greeks converted ideas of natural forces and powers into personifications of these things. Likewise all the other strange practices could be ascribed to an irrationality, a primitive stupidity, for which the Germans have a very ugly word.

In writing *The Golden Bough*, Frazer was applying Locke's theory of the association of ideas to the relatively new subject of anthropology. So the strange beliefs were ascribed to the false association of ideas, or otherwise the failure to distinguish between things which had the appearance of similarity, but were in fact different, or to a mistaken notion of contagion, in which things which were once in contact, are still in contact (the lock of hair, the parings of fingernails, etc.)

All ritual action throughout history could thus be explained as intellectual error, along with the very idea of the sacred. Even now, patterns of behaviour and belief are understood by anthropologists in terms of the product of intellectual associations, which may be the outcome of local cultural social dynamics, or even some kind of pathological response to the world. They aren't looking for a rational explanation for ritual and sacred phenomena arising from an idea of Being.

By the process of purification it became possible to argue that the real achievement of the Greeks could be understood in terms of different aspects of their culture - the practical nature of their philosophical thought; the interpretation of their sculpture, along with their architecture, in terms of aesthetics and proportion; and their literature could be appreciated in terms of style. All of which could be approached with minimal taint from the irrationality of other areas of Greek culture. What resulted from this process was the cultural gold which the scholars were after. They had uncovered the Greek genius.

After reading *The Golden Bough*, I wondered if Frazer had ever written about Plato. I quickly found that he had, in the extensive essay *The Growth of Plato's Ideal Theory*, mentioned at the beginning of this foreword. I also wondered at the fact that the essay was a discussion of the idea of Being, and its worth, in the works of Plato. It is clear from the essay that he had read all of the important works in the Platonic canon, and may perhaps have read every one of the dialogues, and also the letters. So he knew about Plato's discussions related to the idea of Being, and that it was an idea which runs, one way or another, all through the canon.

The demolition of the practice of magic, and of superstition in general in the pages of *The Golden Bough*, may however, not have been Frazer's

principal scholarly purpose. It might instead have been to demolish any cultural significance which could be attached to the idea of Being. His key argument against its significance is that nothing can be predicated of it, and that therefore it is a barren notion. Plato, as the historical root of rational discussion of the idea of Being, would be the target of choice for someone wishing to eliminate this piece of superstition.

As far as Frazer was concerned, he had dealt with Plato long ago. And he had, at least to his own satisfaction. In his essay, he makes much of the study of Plato's literary style, as a way of dating the dialogues, and therefore the chronological development of Plato's ideas. By itself, to state that his ideas were subject to development is to say that Plato did not have a clear idea of the basis of the Forms, and also of the idea of Being. They were concepts in development, subject to criticism, and not fully formed ideas. Plato's arguments were not suspended from an overarching concept of Being, though he often wrote as if they were.

Frazer chose to publish his essay late in his life. It is possible, perhaps probable, that he regarded his prize essay to be his most important work, despite the inevitable imperfections in an essay written by such a young man. The essay tells us much about his intellectual life that we wouldn't otherwise know, and that he may have had much more ambition than we ever used to think.

Some parts of the text of my essay form the basis of the discussion of Plato in *The Sacred History of Being*, published in November 2015.

Thomas Yaeger, March 3-11, 2016

Foreword 1999

One way or another, this study has been under way since 1987, when I first became interested in J.G. Frazer's intellectual background. I had been struck by the character of the tenaciously maintained argument of the *Golden Bough*, largely because the phenomena discussed in that work were discussed purely in terms of the association of ideas, and not in terms

of a theory of Being. I was well aware that similar phenomena had been discussed elsewhere in the context of a theory of Being, and was curious to understand this omission: in particular I wanted to find out about Frazer's views on Platonism. I found that Frazer had written an entire essay, *The Growth of Plato's Ideal Theory*, when he was twenty four, in order to compete for a fellowship at Cambridge, and that this little known essay was published in 1930, one year before Wittgenstein put pen to paper with his own criticisms of Frazer (themselves not published until 1967): Wittgenstein does not seem to have been aware of the content of this essay, but was well aware of the curious omission of references to Plato and the theory of Being in the relevant parts of the *Golden Bough**.[1]

The whole enterprise of the *Golden Bough* is shaped by both the attitudes to matters of ontology and epistemology revealed in *The Growth of Plato's Ideal Theory*, and to Frazer's view of Plato's intellectual development. By the age of twenty-four, Frazer had removed both magic and religion from the context of a theory of Being, and the possibility that this might have been an error does not seem to have been a thought which occurred to him. The monumental scholarship of the *Golden Bough* and his other works, however, might suggest to us that he was, for the whole of his life, driven to validate his denial of the role of a theory of Being in magic and religion.

In 1987 I made extensive notes on Frazer's essay, but the project was largely put aside for several years while I was studying ancient history at University College London. The project was resumed in 1993, and an initial version was completed in late September of that year. A number of minor changes were made up until October 1995 (mostly re-Englishing). The current version differs very little from both of these versions, with the main exception of the concluding sections, which have been largely re-written. This is the first version to circulate.

Bath, New Year's Day 1999.

Section One

1.1. Plato discussed the theory of the Forms from different standpoints in a number of dialogues, principally the *Phaedrus*, *Theaetetus*, *Cratylus*, *Meno*, *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Timaeus*, *Parmenides*, and the *Sophist*. The chronological order of these dialogues has been established according to style and also according to the supposed development of Plato's thought*[2]. That is to say, the body of work which presents discussion of the theory of the Forms is presumed to be, in effect, work in progress; presumed to represent stages in research in successive papers. There is thus a beginning to the programme, a middle stage, and an end.

1.2. Is it reasonable to treat these works in this way? It is implicit in this treatment that the Academy can be understood as a research institution: a place where epistemological and ontological questions were discussed, papers given, and the results published. In all essential respects, in fact, a place engaged in the same kind of activity as the nineteenth century European university, where this analysis first originated. However, as Cherniss has shown*[3], though scholars have often spoken of public lectures taking place at the Academy, we have evidence only of one lecture of any sort being given by Plato (a mathematical treatment of the Good).

1.3. We know only that matters of epistemology and ontology were discussed within the Academy. Note for example the curious passages in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* where he speaks as a Platonist: perhaps recalling arguments he used while a member of the Academy. Thus *Metaph*. 990b:

... not one of the arguments by which we try to prove that the Forms exist demonstrates our point: from some of them no necessary conclusion follows, and from others it follows that there are Forms of things of which we hold that there are no Forms.*[4]

1.4. We know from the dialogues that the theory of the Forms was presented by Plato himself as having collapsed, in that the Forms, apparently so clearly distinguished as having no participation in each other,

are shown to participate*[5]. And, in any case, if they do not participate because of their absolute nature, it would be impossible for us to have any knowledge of them. Thus again, if they participate, it would appear that they are not absolute.

1.5. This might be taken to indicate the integrity of Plato, in that he faithfully recorded the demolition of everything he stood for*[6]. However at no point in the work of Plato is his enterprise presented as it is interpreted: it is not given to us as a chronological sequence of discussions, nor as a series of arguments which develop one out of the other*[7]

Section Two

2.1. Frazer's early essay, *The Growth of Plato's Ideal Theory*, discusses the relations between the various dialogues which appear to be concerned with the Ideal theory, and the course of development which he perceives in their sequence. He begins by asserting that "the earliest Greek philosophies were philosophies of Being". This he ascribed to the childlike quality of the earliest Greek philosophers, for "the child looks outward; reflection, the turning of the mind inward on itself, comes only in later life". Frazer is quite explicit about this: he states that "the days of the Ionic, Eleatic, and Pythagorean schools were the childhood of philosophy; reflection began with Socrates". This is a bold assertion; in practice all critics of Greek philosophy have followed this line since Frazer, though he did not originate it. Thus Socrates, Plato and Aristotle are distinct from the Presocratic philosophers in that they were concerned with epistemological issues rather than the question of the nature of Being alone, and any deductions about the nature of Being were in fact deductions from epistemology. "...previous philosophies had been objective, the new philosophy was subjective,"*[8] meaning by this that the apparatus of perception and judgement was, from Socrates onwards, a major issue.

2.2. Socrates great innovation, for Frazer, was that "he looked to the processes or workings of our intellectual faculties and the results they gave... without any reference to... ultimate composition or substance"*[9] .

He investigated the faculty of generalization*[10] which, resting on memory, comparison, and abstraction, "reduces what would otherwise an unconnected train of sensations to an orderly system of knowledge"*[11] . He argues that, when Socrates asked the question: what is the Beautiful, the Ugly, etc., he was not asking about the kinds of existence to which the terms beauty, or ugly, were appropriate, but simply what conception do we have of beauty? That is to say, what notion do we have of beauty in terms of appearance rather than in terms of Being? Frazer argues that for Plato the same question meant something quite different, for "the Socratic theory of knowing was turned into the Platonic (and Aristotelian) theory of Being"*[12]

2.3. For, in the dialogues of Plato where the theory of the Forms is discussed, Socrates understands the Forms to accord both with a hierarchy of perception and, as it were, degrees of Being*[13]. This, for Frazer is Plato's great error, for inference of general laws is "only the road to knowledge, not to existence"*[14] He argues that both Plato and Aristotle overlooked this and, "in the joy felt at the great discovery they deified general notions, making our highest form of knowledge the highest form of existence"*[15]. The power of generalizing notions, though "the necessary condition of reasoning" and its strength, "is also a badge of its weakness", for:

Winged by this power, our thought can travel on into regions of space where no human eye has penetrated or foot trod, it can pass back into regions of time when man was not, and forward into the future, when man and the system of which he is an insignificant member, shall be no more. But if this power casts a gleam on the distant in space and time, it equally reveals the darkness, for it shows us what we do not know, and the unknown is vastly greater than the known*[16]

2.4. In the second section of Frazer's work, which follows almost immediately, he attempts "to trace the history of that gigantic yet splendid error, which converted a true theory of knowledge into a false theory of Being".*[17] He notes that Aristotle informs us that Plato was familiar with Heraclitean doctrine in his youth *[18], but argues that this does not surface in his early work; instead "Plato started completely from the

Socratic standpoint"*[19] and supports this by matching Xenophon's description of Socrates concerns with the subject matter of the early Socratic dialogues in which the theory of the Forms does not put in an appearance. This suggests strongly that the later Ideal theory of Plato (assuming for the moment the accuracy of the supposed chronological sequence, or its importance) grew out of an epistemological theory developed in the first instance by Socrates, who broke ranks with the earlier Greek philosophers for whom Being was the proper object of study*[20].

2.5. Is this the correct way to see the genesis of the theory of the Forms? That it grew out of the notion of universal propositions in ethical matters, first critically explored by Socrates? Almost in passing on p12, in connection with Socrates convicting individuals of ignorance, Frazer notes that Socrates insisted "on that knowledge of self which the Delphic inscription prescribed"*[21] . This is a casual mention of a commonplace, since both the inscription at Delphi and the Socratic encounter with the oracular establishment are well known. Yet the relation between the activity of Socrates and the approval by the oracular establishment is an important one for determining whether the introduction of reasoning into moral subjects was in fact achieved by Socrates irrespective of any contemporary theories of Being, or whether the introduction of reason into the realm of moral subjects was, either by analogy with contemporary ontologies, or because moral reason was always seen as the corollary, as one whole side of an ontological theory.

2.6. When Frazer speaks of the earliest philosophers in Greece being philosophers of Being he is speaking of the presentation by Aristotle of the earliest thinkers struggling to understand the nature of Being. He does not mean philosophers of Being *qua* Being, apart from concrete properties (it is thus that Frazer can be spared the charge that Plato's concern with Being took philosophy back to its childhood). The notion of Being among the Greeks is, for Frazer, a process of discovery: it did not achieve its Parmenidean zenith all of a piece. Thus, the earliest speculations developed out of concrete notions and proceeded to greater and greater generalizations.

2.7. This view implicitly accepts the broad picture of the early history of Greek philosophy presented by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*, which, criticism has shown to be polemical in the interest of Aristotle's own position (his view of the nature of the Platonic Forms, for example, does not do full justice to the sophistication of Plato's arguments). The reason for this is quite straightforward: Aristotle is attempting to show that the logical development of philosophical speculation is towards the clarity and rigour of his own method.

Section Three

3.1. Frazer's elevation of Socrates to that of the pioneer of epistemology is not well supported by his own argument. In several places he argues that reasoning, inference and generalization were Socrates special concern*[22] and that "only through the power of generalization have we any knowledge that is of practical value"*[23] "The discovery of this law of our thinking was due to Socrates"*[24]

3.2. And again, more precisely, the valuable discovery of Socrates was "that all practically useful knowledge of individual things is only attainable through general notions"*[25]. Here however, he wisely begins to withdraw from his bold assertion, adding "as far as it went, this doctrine was true and useful. It was simply a doctrine of knowing, not of being"*[26] . Later on the same page he admits that "though correct (the Socratic doctrine of knowledge), it was barren, because it sought notions, not truths".

3.3. What has happened here is that Frazer has reflected on his claim for Socrates and realized that in effect, by asserting the practicality of the Socratic contribution to the theory of knowledge, he was attributing an empirical and experimental attitude of mind to Socrates. This is clearly nonsense, as he proceeds to explain:

...a notion is single, a truth is double, it is the union of two notions as subject and predicate; and as in nature, so in thought, the solitary is barren, production is only made possible by union. Induction in the hands

of Socrates was used as an instrument to the formation of notions or conceptions; but these notions remained barren, being alone*[27]

3.4. That is, if a notion remains simply a notion with no proposition made about it which can be subjected to experiment (which process the Greeks never formalised), the notion is virtually impossible to falsify [except on logical grounds]. Thus,

with us Induction is used as an instrument to the attainment of truths, of true propositions, and the result is the vast discoveries of modern science. Do what he could, it was impossible for Socrates to reach anything fresh by his method, for we get out of a notion only what we choose to put into it*[28].

3.5. Looking closely at this, the contrast made by Frazer between the method of Socrates and Plato is ineffective: Socrates is not the great epistemological pioneer whose work was subject to enthusiastic misuse by the ontologically minded Plato. Though it is true that he sought universals in moral subjects, a subjective concern, he used precisely the same method of generalization. The methods of both Socrates and Plato are barren, and for the same reason: whether in the field of epistemology or ontology, both (according to the Frazerian analysis) dealt with notions rather than ascertainable truths. Their conclusions were not subject to falsification.

3.6. Frazer argues that the method of induction "...has been so fruitful in modern times"*[29]. "...in application to the physical sciences... this method has been productive of vast results... it was first applied to physical science (as by Bacon and his predecessors as well as successors)..."*[30]

3.7. With this opinion Frazer has moved into uncertain waters. While it is true that induction has been a key element in the development of modern experimental science (necessary for the framing of hypotheses), no scientist would ever claim to have employed it methodically as Bacon proposed. Bacon's *Novum Organum* never appears on the reading list of the undergraduate chemist, physicist, etc., unless he is also studying the history of science*[31] The concept of inductive method was stillborn. The activity, the practice of science, falsified early the barren notion of a

formalised process of generalization. Science has achieved what it has without a specific inductive method: the practitioners of science have proceeded to greater and greater generalizations about the nature of the world without making generalized propositions about a key part of their activity. When scientific method is discussed and taught, scientists mean those parts of their subject about which generalizations are possible, namely the practice of experiment and the rules of deduction. But these things are more often than not taught by example, in the same manner as the teaching of a practical skill, or a craft. Inductive processes simply cannot be intellectually formalised: Frazer's grasp of the activity of science is that of the average victorian, and he confuses the theoretical history and development of science with the actuality of its progress. Likewise, he confuses its theoretical condition with the reality: at no point did he look closely enough at the evidence to be disabused of his illusions in this respect.

3.8. Frazer learned his science, not from acquaintance with practitioners, nor from the writings of scientists: rather he acquired his knowledge of it from those who wished to import some aspects of the craft (which is probably the best word for it) into areas formerly using different methods and different criteria to achieve their results. The glamour of the Newtonian achievement changed forever the perception of the worth of older approaches to the acquisition of knowledge; hence Hume's first published work announced in its subtitle that it was an attempt to import experimental method into the study of moral subjects (though ironically, as early as the preface he acknowledges that the field of study forbids actual experiment). In short, Frazer learned of science from faulty representations of what the activity is about: from those who wished to participate in the reputation of scientific activity, but whose grasp of the craft was hypothetical and unschooled.

3.9. The outlook of Frazer is essentially that of Locke and Hume, since he argues that:

A general notion is simply a mental collection of attributes which we have found existing in a number of separate particulars. Thus everything in the notion is borrowed from the particulars; he who has grasped the

particulars has implicitly the notion, for he has all the materials out of which the notion is formed, and when he has developed the notion out of the particulars, he has gained by the process no fresh knowledge; he has simply rearranged in a more lucid order his old stock of knowledge*[32].

3.10. This is a rather barren definition of knowledge. It is also contradicted by his enthusiasm for science. If "useful" is substituted for "lucid" then surely it is clear that something has been gained. Even lucidity has to be represented as something fresh and of practical use. Information - what there is to be known - subsists in arrangement as much as in material. Michaelangelo's *David* was certainly implicit in the block of stone out of which it was carved, according to his method, but the exhibition of the unhewn stone is unlikely to have made the same impact on our consciousness as did the finished work*[33].

3.11. In short, Frazer's engagement with Locke, Hume (and Kant) arises out of the fact that their idealism was of the subjective variety: each dealt with the question of how the mind apprehends and understands the world, without asserting anything about the nature of the latter.

3.12. Frazer's conception of knowledge is heavily influenced by the successes of modern science, and he is willing to accord value to its practical consequences. The refinement of the tool of the human mind is, if practicality is desirable, a means by which the understanding of the objective world is improved, and the material condition of man enhanced. This, however, involves as great an assumption about the nature of the objective world as Plato ever made concerning ontology. The study of man and the formalization of his means of generalization, romantic fiction though it may have been, makes sense only if it is assumed, as Russell assumed, that the real world, whether conceived of as being or as substance, has a nature which is self-consistent with the rigour of mathematical law*[34] There is a "public neutral reality" which we may approach and understand by the refinement of our mental apparatus. Indeed, such a presumption is necessary if the project of the clarification of mental procedures is to be worthwhile. If it is the case that the "public neutral reality" is as fickle as the undisciplined human mind, then the

whole project is, if not doomed from the start, an immeasurably more complicated undertaking.

3.13. By contrast, Plato made no such assumption about the nature of the reality behind appearance. Whereas Frazer necessarily assumes self-consistency of the reality behind appearance, at odds with the nature of appearance and all experience, Plato merely assumes that the objects of perception are as fickle in their nature, as inconsistent as the faculties of perception.

3.14. Frazer is forcing Socrates into the role of precursor of a philosophical outlook which he finds, if not congenial, at least satisfactory. But as he is forced to admit, Socrates cannot, if any degree of precise argument is employed, be fitted to the role. Whether or not Socrates bears any resemblance to the subjective idealists (Locke, Hume, Kant, etc.) is fundamentally irrelevant because they did not substantially contribute to the development of the practice of science; and this is so for precisely that reason Frazer was forced to admit in the case of Socrates: he dealt with the matter of general notions inducted from particulars and not with testable propositions.

3.15. From Bacon through Descartes to Newton and Locke (only the last of whom can be accurately categorized as a subjective idealist), the idea that the external world operated according to laws with iron consistency gained the high ground, and the corollary also, that by refining our approach to the natural world we might better understand it. That there is a reality out there which is subject to immutable law, to universals of some kind, even if the conscious mind cannot cannot discover the essence of its nature. This we may identify as the central act of faith in the scientific enterprise*[35]

3.16. Frazer follows this act of faith, and understands his Socrates accordingly. The contradictions which result are not aired in his essay. Whether or not one accepts the Platonic description of Socrates, Socrates had a notion of Being. Xenophon describes him engaged in the customary sacrifices and religious observances of the Athenians. A man who claims a daemon, as Xenophon reports, has to have a conception of the ultimate reality, for one cannot reasonably claim the advice of an intermediary being between oneself and the ultimate Being if there is no ultimate Being.

And Xenophon, together with the remarks in Aristotle, is the source for Frazer's characterization*[36]

3.17. The authentic Socrates is therefore problematic. The sources which Frazer employs do explicitly portray Socrates as concerned more or less exclusively with ethical issues, while at the same time presenting information which may be interpreted as suggesting an alternative *modus operandi* for Socrates.

Section Four

4.1. The problem of the authentic Socrates may reside mainly with ourselves: we make a clear distinction between ethical issues and matters of ontology. A proper reading of Aristotles's *Ethics* however, shows quite clearly that ethical issues were not distinguished in this way by Plato's pupil. The anabasis of the soul described in that work implies at the least a metaphorical emulation of the condition of the divine*[37] . The whole universe is conceived by Aristotle as a moral hierarchy from insect to the Good, and we do well to recall the passage in the *Timaeus* where Plato speaks of a similar hierarchy, ascended and descended according to the moral worth of the individual in life:

... by virtue of necessity... their bodies are subject to influx and efflux, [and] these results would necessarily follow, - firstly sensation that is innate and common to all proceeding from violent effections; secondly, desire mingled with pleasure and pain; and besides these, fear and anger and all such emotions as are naturally allied thereto, and all such as are of a different and opposite character. And if they shall master these they will live justly, but if they are mastered unjustly. And he that has lived his appointed time well shall return again to his abode in his native star, and shall gain a life that is blessed and congenial; but whoso has failed therein shall be changed into woman's nature at the second birth; and if, in that shape, he still refraineth not from wickedness he shall be changed every time, according to the nature of his wickedness, into some bestial form after the similitude of his own nature...*[38].

4.2. It has been argued, essentially following the Frazerian model of antiquity, [*Before Philosophy*, Henri Frankfort, et al.] that, among ancient cultures the world was conceived as a place populated entirely by entities, so that relation with the things in the world was essentially understood in terms of "I" and "Thou": subject and object, whether animate or inanimate, were understood to belong to the same generic category. But this presumes - for reasons which seem quite sound to us - that in fact the subjective and objective worlds are generically different. Thus, it would seem that to parallel epistemological processes with ontological ones must be to make an error. The implication of this view is that, at best, the ancients failed to formalise the difference between the two realms, and, at worst, that such a distinction never occurred to them.

4.3. If it is true that the ancients never came to grips with the distinction between the realms of the subjective and the objective, and therefore the distinction between the animate and inanimate, then it must follow that the ancient perception of the nature of the world must have been altogether in error (to which Wittgenstein objected), and the earliest part of human history may be legitimately characterized, with Frazer, as a childhood. The supposed failure to distinguish between the processes of the subjective and objective realms means that we can read the past as a struggle for the acquisition of the skill to do so: all arguments form part of an unplanned sequence, a blind upward groping toward the light of understanding. Whereas if the yoking of the subjective and objective realms owes its origin to the reasoned idea of the final cause, the concept of a final completeness of the world in which everything has its place and function, then we cannot with confidence interpret dialectical arguments or the evidence of human activity in antiquity as part of a blind anabasis, an improvised ascent to a rational understanding. This for the simple reason that these arguments and actions took place within a context in which the basic rational frame was *already taken for granted*. The importance of this is hard to overstate.

4.4. For now, the attempt to disinter the evidence for the unwritten history of the final cause as an idea is close to impossible: for, though the idea of the final cause might be admitted in the writings of earlier authors (Herodotus, Bk. I.30-33, already quoted, much of Homer, etc.), it is not

understood to be intimately bound up with the view of reality which emerges from the Platonic corpus. Hence, evidence of the earlier history of the idea of the final cause is not of itself evidence for Platonism as a body of work emerging from an older pattern of ideas. Instead, the final cause is treated by critics as a traditional element within a radical programme of inquiry. By contrast, I argue that the Platonic teaching was not an exploration of reality by means of dialectical enquiry involving the use of traditional elements; but that Plato crossed well-rehearsed territory, probably with arguments more or less of his own construction.

Section Five

5.1. The *Timaeus* contains a famous passage which discusses the manner in which the forms are conjoined with body:

...it is not possible that two things alone should be conjoined without a third; for there must needs be some intermediary bond to connect the two. And the fairest of bonds is that which most perfectly unites into one both itself and the things which it binds together; and to effect this in the fairest manner is the natural property of proportion*[39].

5.2. The context of this passage is an attempt to explain water and air as intermediary between fire and earth, but what Plato is giving us is more general: a theory of participation which has been the root of the western tradition in art and architecture ever since:

For whenever the middle term of any three numbers, cubic or square, is such that as the first term is to it, so is it to the last term - and again, conversely, as the last term is to the middle, so is the middle to the first.

5.3. This passage is quite critical for the understanding of the logic of Plato's enterprise, for what follows is in fact a non-sequitur:

- then the middle term becomes in turn the first and the last, while the first and last become in turn middle terms, and the necessary consequence will be that all the terms are interchangeable, and being interchangeable they all form a unity*[40].

5.4. Why is it a necessary consequence that all the terms are interchangeable? Each of the terms bears a relation to the others, a proportionate similitude, and each can become first, middle and last terms in an extended sequence, but they are not the same as each other. They are conjoined with one another, but in sequence. They bear likeness to each other in the proper sequential order but not otherwise. It depends on the arrangement. Given the proper arrangement, one may pass through the sequence and establish degrees of similitude between all the different terms. But they are still not the same. They participate in each other, but their proportionate similitude is not identity, and that is essentially what Plato is claiming here.

5.5. I think that there is no doubt that this is what Plato means, and it is up to us to explain it. Clearly it underpins the description of the activity of the philosopher in the *Republic*, where it is said that the process of argument:

...treats assumptions not as principles, but as assumptions in the true sense, that is, as starting points and steps in the ascent to something which involves no assumption and is the first principle of everything; when it has grasped that principle it can again descend, by keeping to the consequences that follow from it, to a conclusion. The whole procedure involves nothing in the sensible world but moves solely through forms to forms, and finishes with forms.*[41].

5.6. What Plato is arguing is that, by systematic dialectical enquiry, we can rise from the realms of likelihood and opinion, where we encounter only similitudes, to the realm in which certain knowledge is possible. This is to be achieved by passing through the similitudes, on account of their similitude, to their ultimate origin, the Form of the Good.

5.7. In a sense the Platonic dialogues can be understood in this way - as excursions from selected assumptions - and the *Republic* and the *Timaeus* illustrate this very well - both employ series of images, of likelihoods which are to be understood as metaphors or similitudes of the general notion which is to be grasped. We are to reject the accounts of the making of the universe in the *Timaeus*, on the grounds that these accounts possess merely likelihood, and no more. The general notion or the ultimate

reality behind the accounts is not to be grasped by collation of the versions, but by an altogether more mysterious process of induction.

Section Six

6.1. Other dialogues also can be understood as discussions of the same propositions from different points of view, though it is not necessary to invoke the notion of a programme of research. For example, the*Theaetetus* represents an attempt to determine whether or not knowledge can be attained through sensation, which of course it cannot - Plato defines sensation in such a way in the *Timaeus* that such a conclusion is impossible, i.e., it is a product of motion and therefore of flux, and not part of the intelligible realm. In this region there is nothing to know. Sensation itself, as a subjective phenomenon, requires some principle by which it may be organised if sense is to result and Frazer argues that: "without knowledge of past or future, without knowledge of things, we would be but series of totally distinct sensations"*[42] Later however, as we shall see, Plato's argument that there is nothing to know in the sensible world breaks down in a highly significant way at *Soph*. 245-248.

6.2. It is not surprising that the conclusion of the *Theaetetus* is negative: it supports Plato's contention that knowledge is not attainable either through sensibles nor through the organs of sense themselves. This negative result does not invalidate the theory of the Forms but rather makes such a conjecture necessary, since other ways of accessing knowledge are made to seem implausible.

6.3. The *Cratylus* essentially rehearses the kind of argument later to emerge among the nominalists and realists, discussing the relationship between words and the things they represent, and whether or not the relationship is a necessary one. If the relationship is a necessary one, one would expect that study of the words themselves might be a useful way of investigating the ideas they represent. However, we have to reckon with the possibility of bad copies. Hence it is that we must study their essence, the Ideas themselves, for the relationship between words and the things

they represent is conventional and arbitrary. The apparent corollary of this is that the ideas have some kind of absolute reality quite apart from the way in which they are manifest to us.

6.4. The view is expressed in the *Phaedrus* that of all the qualities of which there are Forms (such as Justice, Temperance, Knowledge, Beauty), only the idea of Beauty has a sensible conterpart upon earth.*[43] This is particularly significant in that it apparently makes clear that form in the mundane sense of "shape" is not of itself admitted to the intelligible world (yet shape necessarily participates in the intelligible world in so far as it is beautiful, according to the theory of proportion discussed in the *Timaeus*). If Plato meant this seriously it implies that the metaphors employed, say, in the myth of the Cave in the *Republic* are to be understood as metaphors alone: likewise the image of a qualitative hierarchy of images of the form of the Good is itself a metaphor. We are not to understand the shape of an intelligible object as its intelligible nature.

6.5. Again, it is difficult to overstress this, and I shall return to the notion of shape later in this essay.

6.6. The theme of the *Republic* is apparently Justice, but, as always with Plato, the real subject is problematic. As Frazer rightly observes, the theory of the Forms is here completed both on the subjective and objective sides. That is, while the capacity of human beings to make intelligent sense of information varies greatly, the world of things which may be perceived (let us be no more precise than that) is likewise, when below the world of intelligible forms, subject to change and error in its nature. Reality, as it manifests itself, does so in a way which is inconsistent and chaotic and has no fixed nature in itself, compounding the difficulties experienced by the mind with its similar incapacities. It is this close parallel, this mirror equation of perception and perceived which Frazer attacks as "Plato's fundamental error".

6.7. The *Republic* is often understood as a utopia: as a description of a perfect arrangement of human society. That utopias are impossible is acknowledged by the *Republic* itself: it is admitted in the course of the dialogue that such a Republic has never existed on earth, nor is it likely to exist, though it might exist, sometime somewhere. It is thus a likely story

drawing its worth from its likelihood*[44] Plato is peddling a fiction and tells us so.

Section Seven

7.1. Frazer understands the extensive mathematical component of the *Timaeus* as a Pythagorean import: this implies that, according to the chronological scheme of the dialogues which makes the *Timaeus* late (and it may be), Plato's philosophy was becoming eclectic, absorbing a philosophical outlook which did not naturally belong to his work in its earlier phase. Is this the case? Given the argument about beauty in the *Phaedrus* it seems that the mathematics underpinning the relations of things which belong together are logically implicit in the theory of the Forms. However, if Plato's work is understood as a programme of research, it follows that elements in the dialogues which bear a relation to what we know of Pythagoreanism are most likely importations to fill the vacuum left by the departure of the theory of the Forms. By the same token if the chronological sequence of the dialogues collapses or is shown to be irrelevant, the problem of Plato's "eclecticism" changes into another problem altogether.

7.2. A second striking feature of the *Timaeus* is Plato's "failure" to deal directly with the nature and function of God. This is allied to his insistence that he is speaking (through Socrates) in terms of likelihood and that it would be impossible to speak of the maker to the ordinary citizen *[45]. This theogony is thus unique for its period in two major respects: its author tells us that it is not a set of true accounts of the order and nature of things, and the actual accounts given, which are admitted to be no more than likely, apparently give the reason why a true account cannot be given.

7.3. This theogony therefore confronts us with a problem similar to the famous paradox:

All Cretans are Liars: I am a Cretan.

Section Eight

8.1. Parmenides two-fold poem, "The Way of Truth" and "The Way of Opinion", is also subject to the same difficulty: "The Way of Truth" purports to argue the one true way of conceiving the nature of the universe - that it simply is, and therefore is not subject to becoming or passing-away - yet this assertion is admitted to be inadequate for it is in the form of words, and since

all things are a name which mortals lay down and trust to be true - coming into being and perishing, being and not being, and changing place and altering bright colour*[46].

8.2. it cannot be accounted true. The second part of the poem anticipates Plato's detachment from his likely accounts of the making of the universe, for he begins:

Here I cease the trustworthy account and thought concerning truth. From this point learn the opinions of mortals, listening to the deceitful pattern of my words*[47].

8.3. For Parmenides the ultimate reality is the changeless, the complete, the ungenerated and indestructible, the whole, the unwavering.

Remaining the same in the same place it rests by itself and so remaining firmly where it is*[48].

8.4. The traditional interpretation of this is that the world of becoming, of generation and passing-away, does not participate at all in the world of Being, for it lacks nothing and is complete in itself. What becomes is essentially not real, according to the Parmenidean definition, for, in order to become it has to not be. The world of the real and the world of change are entirely separate worlds, and the contemplation of the latter will not assist study of the unchanging reality.

8.5. In Plato's *Parmenides* Socrates and Zeno discuss the One and the Many - the One representing the unchanging, and the many only existing in the world of coming-to-be and passing-away - and conclude that the two worlds have no communication. Commerce between them is not possible.

The Parmenidean objection to the Ideal theory is simply that the realm of the intelligible is not to be known by us. The nature of the Ideal would be breached if knowledge of it were possible. The One simply is; the Many come-to-be and pass away.

8.6. The *Parmenides* is the most impenetrable of Plato's dialogues, and of crucial significance in understanding Plato's programme, since its arguments undermine the Ideal theory. We shall return to this dialogue later in this paper.

Section Nine

9.1. Are there ideas of the bad? Frazer argues that Plato entertained no such notion:

> in the case of pairs of contraries, Plato made an Idea of only one of the pair; for where the contraries were not (like justice and injustice, courage and cowardice) opposed as good and evil, he had no hesitation in making ideas of both contraries, e.g., of greatness and smallness [*Phaedo*, p100e], heat and cold [Id. p103c]. But of qualities distinctly bad, Plato never really constructed Ideas*[49].

9.2. Zeller is criticised by Frazer for affirming that there were Ideas of Evil and Vice*[50] , referring to *Rep*. v. 476, and argues that the passage has reference to knowledge and not to being. Therefore "to twist it into an affirmation of an Idea of Vice is to run counter to the whole tendency of Plato's philosophy". But Frazer's general argument is that Plato converted an epistemological theory into an ontological one*[51] . At 477a Socrates argues that "what fully is is fully knowable, what in no way is is entirely unknowable", which seems to settle the matter: that which is Not-being is unknowable. Frazer however cannot have it both ways: if there is no form of the bad or injustice, etc., then he cannot argue that an epistemological theory has been converted into an ontology. We can conceive of injustice, yet there is no Idea of injustice in the Platonic accounts of the theory of the Forms: and thus the ontological model differs from the theory of

knowledge. There is a resemblance between them, but though similar, they are not identical in detail.

9.3. This difference is of crucial importance, and arises from the difference between the processes of knowing and becoming. The former is inductive from the particulars of experience, whereas generation is in a sense deductive from Being. Those who have knowledge have eyes for the eternal and unchanging things*[52]. However, there are many who

love looking and listening [and] are delighted by beautiful sounds and colours and shapes, and the works of art which make use of them, but their minds are incapable of seeing and delighting in the essential nature of beauty itself*[53].

9.4. These hold opinions only, and do not attain to knowledge of the universal behind the particulars. The ascent toward knowledge is from the particular to the grasp of the general, whereas the ontology proceeds from the general to the particular. Thus all particular objects of knowledge owe their nature to their degree of participation in the Form of the Good, alone and complete, whereas the process of the induction of universals allows the possibility the existence of a subjective form of injustice, ugliness, etc. It is the possibility of error in induction which allows this. And while errors are possible in the opposite direction, *the nature of the errors will not be the same*. Inductive errors include the possibility of conceiving that there is a form of non-being or injustice, etc., because there is no reason whatever, on the grounds of experience, to presume that there is no such thing as the form of Injustice, Ugliness, Intemperance. The impossibility of these forms is determined on *logical* grounds, not on the basis of experience. Justice, Beauty, Temperance, etc., are represented in the celestial sphere by Forms because the ontological theory, adumbrated by Parmenides, demands it. It is the theory of the eternal and unchanging which underpins the presumption that the universe has a coherent root: experience teaches us, as Frazer notes, the power of generalization for practical purposes, but not that ultimate reality is single in its nature, without contrary. Commenting on the fact that nowhere does Plato speak of participation in injustice, etc.,

the fact that he does not do so is all the more striking, since in the *Phaedo*, immediately after insisting on an Ideal beauty by which all beautiful things are beautiful, he at once passes to a pair of contrary qualities (viz. great and small) and says that great things are great by partaking in greatness, small things small by partaking in smallness; thus markedly passing over the Idea of a contrary quality, where that contrary is bad, though introducing immediately afterwards ideas of both members of a pair of contraries, where these contraries are indifferent [*Phaedo* c.49, p100b-e] * [54].

9.5. It is because of the presumption of the reality of the Form of the Good that it is possible for Plato to arrive at a metaphysic of the inductive process, and this presumption has little to do with epistemology. The Good is presumed on logical grounds. Frazer himself recognises this in his essay: "goodness is... that in which all the ideas resemble each other, it is the common feature of the ideas; it is therefore the Idea of Ideas"*[55] . Frazer goes on to say that "thus the supremacy ascribed in the Republic to the Idea of Good admits of an explanation, while on the theory that there were ideas of evil, it is inexplicable."

9.6. One might go further and say that resemblance itself is what constitutes the goodness of the Good. It, more truly than any other thing, is itself. Things participate in the Good in so far as they resemble it. The Identity of the Good with itself is resemblance par excellence*[56].

9.7. Under the spell of the subjective idealists Locke and Hume, who emphasised the tendency of the human mind to proceed according to the association of ideas (whether rational or irrational in nature), Frazer argues that resemblance is a subjective phenomenon, with no objective counterpart or necessary correlate (this constituting the Platonic error). We cannot glorify with the title "the nature of Being" what is in fact a projection of the subjective processes of the human mind into the hypothetical realm of the supersensible.

9.8. It follows therefore that when Plato spoke of the Form of the Good, he spoke of a fiction - of something of which he could not know (even though he claimed it to be fully knowable). We cannot know Being at all for the

reason given by Hume, that we cannot get inside the processes which present themselves to us and understand them from within.

9.9. However the subjective idealists dealt with causal processes. Did Plato? Are we talking about completely different modes of existence? Frazer does not recognise the supersensible world of which Plato spoke. He recognizes only, as I have already indicated, a public and neutral reality which (it is presumed) remains constant in its nature, and which may be approached by means of experiment and induction. When he claims that Plato's method is in error Frazer does two things:

1. Presumes that Plato's objective reality can be treated as if it might be equated with the projected reality behind apparent material phenomena.

2. Presumes that Plato, being concerned with notions of which nothing is predicated (and thus not physically existing) is failing to employ a productive method.

9.10. Frazer thus presents Plato as the failed antecedent of the western empirical tradition. Whereas with Socrates man was on the true path to knowledge, with Plato entered a great error, by his misconception of the nature of the reality behind appearance, since he made of it a mirror of his own psychological processes.

9.11. Might we not argue that Frazer misconceives a reality here, by imposing his own profoundly culture-centric and normative preconceptions on the philosophical activity of the Greeks? He cannot imagine that Plato's conception of the nature of reality is founded upon anything but on a "splendid error"; but perhaps this is due to his attachment to the notion of intellectual progress, and that it is this notion which shapes his treatment of the material. That this may be the case is examined in the last sections of this essay.

9.12. That his analysis of Plato is fundamentally flawed I hope to show in the following sections, emerging from a discussion of the *Sophist*.

Section Ten

10.1. In the *Sophist*, the Ideas, formerly aloof from the world of sensibles and incapable of interaction, turn out to be entities capable of participation in each other. And thus, like objects apprehended by opinion, are compounded both of Being and Not-being.

10.2. At 244c the Eleatic stranger asks whether the Real is "the same thing as that to which you give the name one? Are you applying two names to the same thing...?" And: "it is surely absurd for him [Parmenides] to admit the existence of two names, when he has laid down that there is no more than one thing..." Thus in attempting to define the One Parmenides cannot state it at all "without recognising three real things"*[57].

10.3. At 244d the Stranger questions the notion of the reality as wholeness: is "whole" other than the one real thing or identical with it? For

"... if it is a whole - as indeed Parmenides says*[58]

Every way like the mass of a well-rounded sphere, evenly balanced from the midst in every direction; for there must not be something more nor something less here than there

-If the Real is like that, it has a middle and extremities, and consequently it must have parts, must it not?"* [59].

10.4. The Stranger observes that if a thing is divided into parts it may have the property of unity in terms of an aggregate of its parts, "being a sum or whole". However, "the thing which has these properties cannot be just Unity itself... Unity in the true sense and rightly defined must be altogether without parts"*[60]. Thus, how are we to define the Real - is it one and whole? The property of unity is not unity itself, and alternatively,

if the Real is not a whole by virtue of having this property of unity, while at the same time Wholeness itself is real, it follows that the Real falls short of itself... and further... all things will be more than one since Reality on the one side and Wholeness on the other have now each a distinct nature* [61].

10.5. The Real cannot come to be if wholeness does not exist, for "whenever a thing comes into being, at that moment it has come to be as a

whole; accordingly, if you do not reckon unity or wholeness amongst real things, you have no right to speak of either Being or coming into being as having any existence"*[62]. The Eleatic stranger (possibly representing Plato himself) concludes by observing that "countless other difficulties, each involved in measureless perplexity, will arise, if you say that the Real is either two things or only one"*[63].

10.6. In the *Timaeus* the fully knowable is defined as the eternal and the unchanging, i.e., that which fully "is". However the discussion at *Sophist* 248-249d seems to jettison this definition. The Eleatic stranger observes that the Idealists ("The Friends of Forms": *tous ton eidon philous*, 248a) distinguish between "Becoming" and "Real being": the definition of the former involving the sensible world, and the latter communing via the soul through reflection. And whereas Real being is defined as unchanging, Becoming is subject to change (the word used is *koinonein*: -"to be in touch with". The same word is used of our communion or participation with both change and the changeless). The Eleatic stranger recalls an earlier proposition that the "sufficient mark of real things is the presence in a thing of the power of being acted upon or of acting in relation to however insignificant a thing"*[64]. The Friends of Forms do not accept this argument and reply that: "a power of acting and being acted upon belongs to Becoming, but neither of these powers is compatible with Real being"*[65].

10.7. Thus apparently is distinguished the material world, subject to causal relations, from the world of Forms and those objects which participate in them by acausal means; and the division would seem to be absolute.

10.8. The Friends of Forms acknowledge that the soul knows, and that Real being is known, it is agreed; and then the stranger asks if it is agreed that

knowing or being known is an action, or is it experiencing an effect, or both? Or is one of them experiencing an effect, the other an action?" Or does neither of them come under either of these heads at all?*[66]

10.9. It can of course be neither action or effect, as the text makes clear*[67], if the Friends of Forms are to avoid contradicting their earlier remarks, for:

if knowing is to be acting upon something, it follows that what is known must be acted on by it; and so, on this showing, Reality when it is being known by the act of knowledge must, in so far as it is known, be changed owing to being so acted upon; and that, we say, cannot happen to the changeless *[68].

10.10. Cornford's translation of the remainder of 248e is unsatisfactory, since it obscures one of the most interesting allusions in Plato. A better translation is that of Fowler:

But for heaven's sake, shall we let ourselves easily be persuaded that motion and life and soul and mind are really not present to absolute being, that it neither lives nor thinks, but, awful and holy, devoid of mind, is fixed and immovable?*[69].

10.11. The allusion, *semnon kai hagion*, is, as Campbell noted in his edition of the *Sophist*, to the statues of the gods. This phrase might be written off as of no great moment, but I think it unwise to do so. Reality has been spoken of as 'awful and holy', using a phrase of specific application to the images of the gods. We catch here (I think) a glimpse of the true scope of this argument and its consequences: it concerns the logic underpinning the patterns of belief among the Greeks*[70]. Whereas in his later work Frazer placed philosophy after magic and religion in order of development, it would seem to be in the mind of the speaker that the matter of devotion to the gods hangs or falls by this philosophical argument about whether or not the Real is changeless or changing; and whether or not any form of contact with the gods is at all possible*[71] If this is the correct interpretation, then there is a great deal more at stake here than a mere philosophical disputation.

10.12. We do not easily unpick the significance of this small phrase: we stand at a great distance from the ancient world and have no inside knowledge of whatever intellectual support the ancient religious systems might have employed; Frazer, by arguing that Plato's work is an intellectual progress placed somewhere after religion and before science, makes it difficult for us to imagine that Plato might be operating to some extent within culturally agreed territory, territory intelligible to his peers, and be tackling the questions for essentially the same purposes as other Greeks.

The matter is of course complicated by another difficulty: Plato's systematic avoidance of binding together his likelihoods with the actual theological and religious matrix of contemporary Athens. We need however look no further than the career of his master for an explanation of this.

10.13. At any rate, at this point in the *Sophist* Plato's likelihoods are on the edge of total collapse. Frazer regards this section of the dialogue as representing the point at which Plato could no longer espouse the theory of the Forms. Which implies that Plato understood himself as explaining the nature of the universe in terms of images which approximated to the truth, in the manner of modern scientific hypotheses.

10.14. In response to the Eleatic stranger's positing of the impossible dilemma, that change, life, soul and understanding are unreal, or that the Real has no life and is unchanging, and is devoid of intelligence, Theaetetus responds saying that it "would be a strange doctrine to accept"*[72]. They agree that reality cannot have intelligence without life, and that it must possess soul in which both reside*[73]. But then, possessing intelligence, life and soul, it cannot be said that a living thing remains at rest and is unchanging. The conclusion must be,

if reality has intelligence, life and soul, both things that change and change itself are real*[74].

10.15. The conclusions are drawn by the Stranger: without change there can be no intelligence, but if all things change and nothing abides, intelligence equally could not exist or be discovered. He concludes:

On these grounds, then, it seems that only one course is open to the philosopher who values knowledge and the rest above all else. He must refuse to accept from the champions either of the One or of the many Forms the doctrine that all Reality is changeless; and he must turn a deaf ear to the other party who represent Reality as everywhere changing... he must declare that Reality or the sum of things is both at once - all that is unchangeable and all that is in change*[75].

10.16. That the theory of the Forms, as expressed elsewhere in the Platonic canon, here collapses, is not in dispute. The manner in which

Frazer frames this collapse is however in error, as the result of his use of the questionable assumptions discussed earlier, viz., that Plato's work represents a series of hypotheses concerning epistemological and ontological questions; and that his ontology is a projection, a mirror image of the categories of the faculty of knowing.

Section Eleven

11.1. We now turn to examine what can be inferred of the nature of the ultimate reality (Being) as conceived by Plato, given the limitations of our intellectual tools.

11.2. Ultimately there must be a point of contact between the formal cause and the maker of the universe: this however, as is well known, is not an easy matter to disentangle in Plato. As he says at *Tim* 28c, "... to discover the Maker and Father of this Universe were a task indeed..." Elsewhere the ultimate root of reality is spoken of as the form of the Good. It is spoken of as fully knowable, capable of apprehension by the reason alone. The difficulty of knowing it appears to be a matter of intelligence, of discerning it as the universal among the particulars of the sensible world. It is the eternal and unchanging.

11.3. Yet it turns out that it cannot be fully known: reality is always beyond any description, any categorization we employ to define it. As we rise through the Forms it remains as far distant as ever, eluding any attempt to know it: when it turns out that the Real necessarily participates in the world of change, it is necessary to postulate that reality embraces both the changing and the changeless at the same time. It is thus a paradoxical matrix, for the Forms participate in Not-being as well as Being, and are all around us: the division between the realm of intelligibles and sensible form has broken down.

11.4. Is this a problem of epistemology only? Thus far the major distinction between the realms is that whereas we can conceive of a form of the Bad, such a notion is not given a formal reality by Plato since it is regarded as an absence of Good. Yet when it is shown that the intelligibles must be

subject to change and to participate in Not-being, it cannot be argued that there is a clear distinction between the epistemological and ontological realms. Are we then to say that, after all, Plato confused epistemological and ontological categories? This however would be to presume that it is reasonable to make an absolute distinction between the epistemological and ontological worlds: to presume that they are not inextricably bound up with one another. Naturally if both the Forms and sensible objects possessed of souls and reason owe their "existence" to a single substrate of reality (whatever that might be), at some point they must be in contact with each other and to show formal resemblance. However, although in practice things said about the Real are drawn from the categories of our knowledge, we can only say that Plato projected one into the other *if his final definition of the Real is apprehensible within the categories of knowledge*. Since the Real is apparently beyond our capacity to know, though the argument is carried out with epistemological weapons, using subjective categories, Plato's ontology ought to be beyond a mere projection of the categories of knowledge.

11.5. The ultimate reality, whether it be termed the form of the Good or given another necessarily inadequate name does not reside in space - in fact the notion that things have a place is described as "a kind of bastard reasoning":

we dimly dream and affirm that it is somehow necessary that all that exists should exist in some spot and occupying some place, and that which is neither on earth nor anywhere in the Heaven is nothing*[76].

11.6. In the *Phaedrus* *[77] Socrates speaks of the region above heaven,

never worthily sung by any earthly poet:

It is, however, as I shall tell; for I must dare to speak the truth... the colourless, formless*[78], and intangible truly existing essence, with which all true knowledge is concerned, holds this region and is visible only to the mind...*[79].

11.7. At *Cratylus* 424 we find that shape is not to be admitted. Frazer's remark that "it is impossible for us to accept the Platonic theory of causation, because it depends on Plato's fundamental error, the bestowal

of objective existence on subjective abstractions"*[80] is thus virtually unfathomable. Whatever the nature of Plato's theory of causation might be, it is increasingly clear that his notion of reality bears no resemblance to that implicit in Frazer's critique. A reality which apparently admits of no qualities and quantities which might be apprehended through sense and known by intelligence, has no point of contact with a theory of knowledge except at the point where that theory *breaks down*: That is to say, it is a reality arrived at as the result of a theory of knowledge being extended to the point of the collapse of its integrity. It is not a reality established by an epistemology whose explanatory power is *refined* to the ultimate degree: the Platonic reality is known through the *bankruptcy* of the theory of knowledge*[81].

11.8. The implication of an ultimate reality beyond any human categorization except identity with itself*[82], which nevertheless cannot be spoken of as unchanging is that, for analytical and practical purposes, all the possible categories of knowing are contingent and relative; and likewise, all attempted descriptions of the nature of its Being. The nature of reality is forever beyond our capacity to know on the one hand, and on the other, it is itself beyond any possible self-definition, not because it does or does not change, but because it embraces the all of which both change and the unchanging are illusory substrates.

11.9. Reality, in short, if it is to be described at all, must be conceived of as an *absolute collapse of all possible categories*, both of knowing and of being. All space, all time, all possibility resides here, in no place, at no time, beyond all conception, all manifestation. It is simply whatever it is. If we knew it fully the knowledge would be meaningless to us. And what we can say we know of its nature isn't really knowledge*[83]

11.10. The idea of the Form of the Good therefore, is necessarily simply another device in Plato's armoury of likelihoods. Reality, as the ultimate categorical collapse (we have to give it some useful description), if it resembles anything at all within our experience, anything which supplies a concrete image to the conception, must closely resemble chaos - at the extreme of its nature it is forever beyond ordered interpretation.

Section Twelve

12.1. Immediately following the passage concerning the discovery of the Maker and Father of this Universe, Socrates says that "to declare Him to all men were a thing impossible"*[84]. This can be understood in a number of ways. It might be the case that the matter is too complex to be explained to the ordinary mortal in that it breaches the rules of common sense (and also for us the Aristotelian Laws of Thought); that it is impossible to accurately describe the indescribable, except via metaphor (which is a constant Platonic refrain); and thirdly, that it is simply socially impossible to talk about this conception of reality within the society in which the discussions take place*[85]. That Socrates says at *Phaedrus* 247c that he dares to speak the truth concerning the nature of the region above heaven implies strongly that it is dangerous to do so - and after all, one of the charges against him was that he made theological innovations. Xenophon suggests that, though he was not formally charged with disbelief in the gods *per se*, Socrates was suspected of a form of atheism*[86]. To hold the ultimate reality to be virtually indistinguishable at root from chaos, a place devoid of justice, beauty, order, etc., (and without location in time or space) except in potential, would be indistinguishable to the ordinary citizen from atheism. No wonder therefore that Plato writes the ironical words at *Tim* 40d:

Concerning the other divinities, to discover and declare their origin is too great a task for us, and we must trust to those who have declared it aforetime, they being, as they affirmed, descendants of gods and knowing well, no doubt, their own forefathers.

12.2. Conditioned therefore by the difficulty of the subject matter, and the social impracticability of the doctrine, we are forced to work out the doctrine for ourselves. That the method employed to convey the doctrine sometimes created unnecessary difficulties for the understanding, quite apart from its inherent difficulty is shown by the remark at 48c where some matters are not explained "solely for this reason, that it is difficult for us to explain our views while keeping to our present method of exposition". The dialectical method - which is the alternative - is pointedly

not used concerning these matters: probably because its purpose was to arrive at the kind of negative conclusions found in the *Sophist*. Nevertheless, the description of the Receptacle at *Tim* 50-51 is possibly the clearest exposition in Plato of the Real:

... it is right that the substance which is to receive within itself all the kinds should be void of all forms... that the substance which is to be fitted to receive frequently over its whole extent the copies of all things intelligible and eternal should itself, of its own nature, be void of all the forms... a Kind invisible and unshaped, all-receptive, and in some most perplexing and most baffling way partaking of the intelligible...

12.3. If then, Plato's unwritten doctrine (*agrapha*) placed chaos at the heart of Being, his conclusion would not be out of place among Greek speculations in general as to the nature of the *arche*: the difference is simply that he underpinned this conclusion with powerful philosophical arguments*[87] These we do not have for the earlier speculations, and therefore it is easy to conclude that they did not in fact exist; that the early speculations were not supported by cogent argument, and that the idea of chaos as the root or beginning of things never was any more than a concrete image of disorder. That we find the chaos at the beginning of more or less mythical narratives, at the start of apparently causal chains of creation, suggests no abstract idea, but simply the metaphorical transfer of image from context to context. But Plato himself, putting the argument into the mouth of Timaeus*[88] uses such a concrete image, saying that God

took over all that was visible, seeing that it was not in a state of rest but in a state of discordant and disorderly motion, He brought it into order out of disorder...

12.4. We have virtually the whole of the Platonic corpus: of the earlier philosophers we have fragments like the one above. We should be cautious in presuming the absence of clear reasoning behind images simply because we have no access to such reasoning: that we do read concrete conceptions into the concrete images of the Presocratics is partly due to the fact that this was the practice among the ancients themselves, and partly because, building upon this fragmentary and distorted evidence, we

can frame a scheme in which there is a beginning, middle and notional end to the history of ideas, starting with concrete images and working up to pure abstraction.

Section Thirteen

13.1. Frazer's work on the development of Plato's thought has made it more difficult to gain an understanding of the patterns of thought in antiquity - all his subsequent work is based on the presuppositions and arguments found in his early essay, and we still function within the vast paradigmatic frame established by these. And, once in place, the consequences of these presuppositions and arguments are difficult to move aside: particularly the view that the notion of magic before classical times exclusively depended upon the phenomenon of the association of ideas, and therefore can be understood as a simple species of error, a practice developed at the very beginning of man's attempt to understand the world around him.

13.2. Frazer worked within a milieu in which such arguments and assumptions would have been made even without the existence of Frazer himself, for they were on the tide. His later work never departed radically from the path set by his initial essay, and its presuppositions and arguments must be understood if his later monuments are to be assessed at their proper worth. Frazer erected his theory of Magic on the notion that magical patterns of thought, magical procedures, etc., can be explained according to the idea that ordered beliefs about the world are conditioned by the tendency of the mind to associate ideas, whether or not there is in fact such a relation between the objects which give rise to the subjective ideas of them. Thus habitual association gives false weight to notions of the world, and in the absence of adequate procedures of verification, these notions are not easily displaced. In his chapter on "Our Debt to the Savage"*[89] he says that:

When all is said and done our resemblances to the savage are still far more numerous than our differences from him; and what we have in common

with him, and deliberately retain as true and useful, we owe to our savage forefathers who slowly acquired by experience and transmitted to us by inheritance those seemingly fundamental ideas which we are apt to regard as original and intuitive... their errors were not wilful extravagances or the ravings of insanity, but simply hypotheses, justifiable as such at the time when they were propounded, but which a fuller experience has proved to be inadequate. It is only by the successive testing of hypotheses and rejection of the false that truth is at last elicited.

13.3. And since "truth" in science is no more than the best working hypothesis, the one with the greatest degree of competitive plausibility,

...in reviewing the opinions and practices of ruder ages and races we shall do well to look with leniency upon their errors as inevitable slips made in the search for truth...*[90]

13.4. When Frazer speaks of these "inevitable slips", he means the ancient philosophers, including Plato, as well as our "savage" ancestors (that he understood this search for truth as an anabasis without limit is indicated by his provisional inclusion of his own work in this progression). The Platonic hypothesis as framed by Frazer in his essay of 1879 is one which a "fuller experience has proved to be inadequate". Before Plato, before Socrates, we are dealing with a much cruder set of beliefs and opinions concerning the world - the "quaint superstitions, the old-world maxims, the venerable saws which the ingenuity of savage philosophers elaborated long ago..." These customary beliefs and opinions centred around the king: those

men to whom the superstition of their fellows ascribes a controlling influence over the general course of nature... [his] life and health... are matters of anxious concern to the people whose welfare and even existence are bound up with his; naturally he is constrained by them to conform to such rules as the wit of early man has devised for averting the ills to which flesh is heir... The king was enmeshed in these "antique fancies", so that he "could hardly stir a limb for the threads of custom" and was "boundfast within a network of observances from which death or deposition alone could release him*[91].

13.5. And thus it is to ancient kingship and related institutions that we must turn (as Frazer did) if we are to understand the past, for

the life of the old kings and priests teems with instruction. In it was summed up all that passed for wisdom when the world was young. It was the perfect pattern after which every man strove to shape his life; a faultless model constructed with rigorous accuracy upon the lines laid down by a barbarous philosophy...

13.6. And while we can fault the premises of this philosophy, "it deduces for the practical guidance of life a system of rules which in general hangs well together and forms a fairly complete and harmonious whole"*[92].

13.7. Frazer argues*[93] that Magic precedes religion and religion precedes science, as a kind of natural order of progression, "and the order on which magic reckons is merely an extension by false analogy, of the order in which ideas present themselves to our minds", whereas in acuter minds

magic is gradually superseded by by religion, which explains the succession of natural phenomena as regulated by the will, the passion, or the caprice of spiritual beings like man in kind, though vastly superior to him in power... Keener minds, still pressing forward to a deeper solution of the mysteries of the universe, come to reject the religious theory of nature as inadequate, and to revert in measure to the older standpoint of magic *by postulating explicitly, what in magic had only been implicitly assumed*, to wit an inflexible regularity in the order of natural events, which if carefully observed, enables us to foresee their course with certainty and to act accordingly.

13.8. The passage emphasised by my italics is critically important. For Frazer, magic, conceived of as a phenomenon based on the association of ideas, may come to be operated in the absence of an explicit theory of Being, and have nothing to do with such a conception. Nowhere in the *Golden Bough* is there any intimation that notions of magic may arise from a notion of the nature of Being: it would seem that either the idea was considered by him and subsequently dismissed, or that it did not occur to him at all.

13.9. Before passing on to a discussion of the relationship between magic and theories of Being it is worth digressing a little, to consider a methodological problem of Frazer's, which bears on this difficulty in connecting magic and the concept of Being. Frazer does not stratify his evidence: the "beliefs" of "savages" of his own day are conflated with those of antiquity: the magical operations of kings and priests are hardly distinguished in quality from the events recorded in folklore ("the venerable saws... of savage philosophers... which old women at chimney corners still impart as treasures of great price to their descendants"*[94]). Frazer may thus have been in the thoughts of the scholar D'Arcy Thompson, when he complained of those who,

running folklore to the death, seek to read antiquity in the light of savagery; ...who arrive at what I unhesitatingly regard as misconception by the double blunder of unduly depreciating the complexity of initial or archaic Greek thought and unduly exalting the importance and too freely correlating the results of their own study of incipient or semibarbarous civilizations. We must see fallacy in any theory which treats as nascent and primitive the civilization of a period of exalted poetry, the offspring of ages of antecedent culture; which sees but a small advance on recent barbarism in ways of life simple in some respects but rich in developed art and stored with refined tradition; that looks only for the ways and habits and thoughts of primitive man in races supported by a background of philosophical and scientific culture of an unfathomed, and maybe unfathomable antiquity* [95]

13.10. It is a strange and unscientific way to deal with evidence, to assume that it is not necessary to evaluate the worth of each piece on its own merits, quite apart from the question of whether or not it fits into the large picture. But it follows quite naturally from the preconceptions of the time: if there is no ontological basis for the various beliefs of the ancients and savages, how are they to be graded and related to one another and to be given value of any sort? They are all mistakes, and do not form a sequence of a kind that might allow a progression to be determined. Thus Frazer grouped his study of patterns of belief thematically.

13.11. Frazer firmly locates magic as a phenomenon which precedes an explicit theory of Being, the result of quite startlingly false analogical thinking. The error in magic he defines as of two kinds: sympathetic and contagious. In the case of sympathetic magic, "the magician infers that he can produce any effect he desires merely by imitating it". Contagious magic involves the inference "that whatever he does to a material object will affect equally the person with whom the object was once in contact..."* [96].

13.12. Further, he argues that:

its fundamental conception is identical with that of modern science; underlying the whole system is a faith, implicit but real and firm, in the order and uniformity of nature...He [the magician] supplicates no higher power*[97]

.

13.13. Religion also, according to Frazer, is not a phenomenon whose origin can be traced to a theory of Being, despite the fact that it involves "a belief in powers higher than man and an attempt to propitiate or please them"* [98] . Why then does this change in patterns of belief take place? Frazer's attempt to explain this is perhaps the weakest part of his work. He suggests (with diffidence) that

a tardy recognition of the inherent falsehood and barrenness of magic set the more thoughtful part of mankind to cast about for a truer theory of nature and a more fruitful method of turning her resources to account... The discovery amounted to this, that men for the first time recognised their inability to manipulate at pleasure certain natural forces which hitherto they had believed to be completely within their control. It was a confession of human ignorance and weakness... If the great world went on its way without the help of him or his fellows, it must surely be because there were other beings, like himself, but far stronger, who, unseen themselves, directed its course and brought about all the varied series of events which he had hitherto believed to be dependent on his own magic... To these mighty beings, whose handiwork he traced in all the gorgeous and varied pageantry of nature, man now addressed himself,

humbly confessing his dependence on their invisible power... In this, or some such way as this, the deeper minds may be conceived to have made the great transition from magic to religion. But even in them the change can hardly ever have been sudden; probably it proceeded very slowly, and required long ages for its more or less perfect accomplishment. For the recognition of man's powerlessness to influence the course of nature on a grand scale must have been gradual; he cannot have been shorn of the whole of his fancied dominion at a blow... religion, beginning as a slight and partial acknowledgement of powers superior to man, tends with the growth of knowledge to deepen into a confession of man's entire and absolute dependence on the divine*[99]

.

13.14. Thus Frazer detects in the divinities the personification of the great natural forces which man cannot control; and theories of Being, it would appear, have no part to play in this history of man's intellectual development; Being as a concept, it would seem, belongs only to a very narrow rung of the ladder of human intellectual progress, somewhere between the decay of religious explanation and the rise of empiricism and inductive method. The gods are merely inferential beings, without explanation beyond the fact that some such powers, on the basis of experience, must exist, if the nature of the world is to be understood.

13.15. That magic is conceived of as an operative phenomenon depends, as Frazer says, on there being sympathy and contact between things: relation of some sort must exist if magical results are to occur. Frazer argues that this is a species of intellectual error, essentially twofold, in that likeness is misread for identity, and contact for a moment is misread for contact at all times. No theory of Being among the ancients is however invoked by Frazer to explain this pattern of belief. But are we really to accept that at all times *and at all levels*, the practitioners of magic have been the victims of such stupid thoughts? That mere similarity was confused with identity, and that a brief contiguity likewise was taken, of itself, to establish a permanent relationship?

13.16. If we recall the passage in the *Timaeus* where similar forms are asserted to form a unity and thus to be interchangeable, it might be argued

that Plato is attempting to supply an account of the relation of things on the basis of similarity, within the context of a theory of Being*[100]. Frazer perhaps understood the Platonic Philosophy as the culmination of a way of thinking, which, though it attempted to move forward, was boundfast by an inherited and inherent fallacy. But, though it is true that Plato's account of the theory of the Forms is unsatisfactory in the manner in which it is discussed, his theory of Being provides a paradigm of reality in which magical relationships ought to have been intelligible.

13.17. That it does not, on the face of it, provide a model for the understanding of magical relationships in antiquity is due essentially to the history of the interpretation of the fact that, clearly, the theory of Being breaks down in the course of Plato's work, and that the Intelligibles cannot, either exist unmoved, or exist unmoved and be known. The third alternative, which is voiced by the Eleatic Stranger at *Soph*. 249c-d, that Reality embraces both the unchangeable and the changing, similarly appears to have provided no model for the understanding of magical relationships, since it is a default position, agreed among the speakers in the dialogue because they have no other option. If, as in this case, the world of Forms is indistinguishable from the world of changing appearances, it has been understood that we are left with little more than the assertion of relation between similars (looking very like the Frazerian position on magic). Therefore the ultimate "disappearance" of the theory as an explanatory device of any worth is read as Plato's rejection of his own theory; lingering in his work for a time, just as the Ptolemaic account of the Cosmos lingered on (in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for example) after the work of Copernicus and Galileo rendered it theoretically outmoded.

13.18. It would seem therefore that a theory of Being cannot support a pattern of belief, except for those who do not or cannot examine with precision the material which they are to believe. This however, is no reason to reject it as a possibility among the ancients, if we are to accept that they were starting out on the long road to rational thought. After all, the Frazerian picture of the development of Plato's thought implies that he did not spot the fallacies in his argument until late in his career. The fact that a pattern of thought may be held in error does not mean that it may not be held at all.

13.19. Yet the later nineteenth century had a peculiar aversion to allowing a venerable ancient history to the concept of Being, and abstract ideas in general; and this view is still broadly adhered to, though reasons for supporting this model of human intellectual history are increasingly hard to come by. The reasons for the unacceptability of abstract ideas among the ancients are difficult to unravel, but have much to do with the development of anthropological ideas, and the stratification of man, both socially and historically. I have already illustrated that Frazer runs antiquity and the savage close together. A passage from his chapter on "Magic and Religion", p73, suggests that for him the equation was both conscious and quite seriously maintained. He speaks of the diversity of religious views in the world "which affect mainly the intelligent and thoughtful part of the community", but suggests that

when we have penetrated through these differences... we shall find underlying them all a solid stratum of intellectual agreement among the dull, the weak, the ignorant, and the superstitious, who constitute, unfortunately, the vast majority of mankind.

13.20. Here Frazer tells us something of the strong sense possessed by the upper levels of society in late victorian England that they were supported by a large mass of people they neither knew or understood. This belief was strongly held:

One of the great achievements of the nineteenth century was to run shafts down into this low mental stratum in many parts of the world, and thus to discover its essential identity everywhere... This universal faith, this truly Catholic creed, is a belief in the efficacy of magic... Among the ignorant and superstitious classes of modern Europe it is very much what it was thousands of years ago in Egypt and India, and what it now is among the lowest savages surviving in the remotest corners of the world*[101]

13.21. The equation is clear. The repellent fascination with a barbarous antiquity is kin to the nineteenth century fascination with the horrors of what he later calls "a standing menace to civilization", the "solid layer of savagery beneath the surface of society... unaffected by the superficial changes of religion and culture"*[102]

. Naturally, given this equation as a premiss, it is impossible to ascribe to the ancients of remotest historical time, steeped in magic and ritual as they were, a capacity to deal in abstract ideas; far less that the details of their culture and beliefs might have been shaped by theories of Being.

13.22. This unfortunate association of ideas was understood, in the late nineteenth century, to make necessary a corollary between the biological nature of populations and their cultural production. There is not much evidence for this notion however: and no indication at all that there has been a change in the capacity of man to deal in abstractions over historical time. Changes in intellectual production ought to be approached - initially at least - as purely cultural phenomena. But the idea of the corollary between the "low mental stratum" and the "savage" was so strongly held that it occurred to few that they were dealing with a persuasive notion rather than an established fact.

Section Fourteen

14.1. So far, this essay has consisted of the argument that both the Frazerian account of Plato's theory of Being and the Frazerian theory of Magic were developed in the light of the idea that man has progressed from an initial set of mistaken notions of the world, and that this was only possible by Frazer misreading key sources of evidence. Misrepresentation of the evidence by Frazer has not been a mainstay of my case thus far: however, the next section concerns a curious exclusion of materials relevant to his enquiry.

14.2. In Frazer's early essay, Plato's *Parmenides* is scarcely discussed at all. This is particularly surprising, for the *Parmenides* contains criticism of Plato's doctrine by Plato himself; criticisms not adequately answered either in that dialogue or elsewhere in the canon. The chronological position of this dialogue is thus immensely important if we consider the work of Plato as a development. Of it he says*[103] "the contents of the *Parmenides*, especially its searching criticism of the Ideal theory, makes the lateness of its composition almost unquestionable". But in discussing the relative

priority of the *Theaetetus* and the*Parmenides* he says that the question of the date "...is after all unimportant"*[104] . On p93 he says that he fully agrees with Strumpell that "the *Parmenides* was composed at a time of Plato's life when he had become sensible of the difficulties and contradictions attaching to his doctrine of self-existent Forms or Ideas, and when he was looking about for some way of extrication from them". In discussing the relative order of the late dialogues on p104 he then argues that "there are in the *Parmenides*, *Sophist* and *Philebus* very similar passages on the popular difficulties about One and Many... but since these passages probably refer directly to the discussions of the day, nothing can be inferred from them as to the respective dates of the dialogues in which they occur".

14.3. Clearly there is a problem with the *Parmenides* and its significance which should be attended to. Yet Frazer merely describes the dialogue and declines to discuss the second of its two parts on the grounds that he had "not studied it sufficiently (having read it only once and that some years ago) to be able to pronounce an opinion upon it".

14.4. This is at best a puzzling dereliction by Frazer. The *Parmenides* must be the most important of all the Platonic dialogues for an argument of this kind. Yet Frazer writes off the second part of the dialogue (with some visible unease) saying that he "formerly concurred" with Grote that there was "no other purpose in these demonstrations [dialectical deductions from the proposition "the One is"] than that of dialectical exercise"*[105] . "...but a better acquaintance with Plato leads me now to doubt seriously of its truth"*[106] . Surely then the second part should be considered? But he writes that he intends to confine himself "to the first part of the dialogue, the exposition and criticism of the Ideal theory"*[107]

14.5. The *Parmenides* contains a powerful and destructive criticism of Plato's theory of Being, and considers the possibility that the nature of Reality does not arise from the assumptions which our epistemology might suggest; rather that it might be altogether beyond a discursive understanding. It is not disputed to be by Plato. And, given that it destroys what has been traditionally *understood* to be the Platonic Theory of Being, it might be that it is rather a pointer to a wholly different ontology; an

indicator that the essentially negative result of the dialectical exercises of some of the dialogues did not represent the collapse of a philosophical model of reality, but the attainment of its goal. Perhaps at some level Frazer suspected something of the kind, and decided to give the text as wide a berth as possible in the circumstances.

Section Fifteen

15.1. Commentators have always had a great deal of difficulty in accommodating the *Parmenides*. H.N. Fowler, translator of the Loeb edition of the text says (probably echoing Jowett's judgement) that the dialogue seems to be

> a *reductio ad absurdum* of the Eleatic doctrines and methods, put into the mouth of the chief of the Eleatic school. Yet this is the school of thought for which Plato appears to have had the greatest respect... it is hardly to be supposed that the whole purpose of this dialogue is to show the difficulties inherent in the doctrine of Ideas and in the Eleatic doctrine of being, since these are the doctrines which Plato elsewhere advocates... yet this negative result is all that appears with any clearness*[108].

15.2. Jowett asks how, "without a word of explanation, could Plato assign to [Zeno and Parmenides] the refutation of their own tenets?" And, "to suppose that Plato would first go out of his way to make Parmenides attack the Platonic Ideas, and then proceed to a similar but more fatal assault on his own doctrine of Being, appears to be the height of absurdity". Likewise with Plato's persistence with the Forms "after seeing the fatal objections which might be urged against them"*[109]. Jowett therefore avails himself of the escape route favoured by all the modern critics, in some form: "the objection is in reality fanciful, and rests on the assumption that the doctrine of the Ideas was held by Plato throughout his life in the same form". Thus the Platonic Ideas must be "in constant process of growth and transmutation"*[110].

15.3. Miller notes in his *Plato's Parmenides*, as does Cornford in less technical language at *Soph*. 248d, & note 3, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*,

p240, that: "in implicitly attributing sameness and difference to the One as the object of specifically discursive knowledge, leaves open the possibility of a non-discursive knowledge. As non-discursive, such knowledge would transcend the analytic framework of sameness and difference; it would be such insight alone, if any at all, that could reach to the form as such, the form in its innermost being"*[111]. Further: "To be disclosed for what it truly is by collection and division, the form must not only stand as the stable subject of a series of predicates in order, finally, to be spelled out as the whole of these, but it must also be present in a way that precedes discourse and composite structure, present therefore, as a simple nature for a pre-analytic insight or intuition"*[112] . Miller also observes that in the *Sophist* "Plato neither explicitly drops nor explicitly affirms the simplicity of the form" and suggests that to understand these concepts we require to be "open to the possibility of subsurface meaning"*[113].

15.4. This analysis is far from Frazer's, who treated Platonism as others have done, "as a mistake, an attempt to treat adjectives as if they were names, or descriptions of things as if they were themselves things"*[114].

15.5. Miller's analysis supports the case that the default position adopted by the speakers in the Sophist, that Reality must embrace contradictory categories of knowledge and being, is in fact the goal of the dialectic of collection and division, and that, at the heart of Being, all the categories are collapsed together, and that the innermost being of the Forms *is* this condition of categorical collapse. The similar collapse of epistemological categories, far from making access to the Forms impossible, might be understood to be another way to represent what he describes as "pre-analytic insight" or "intuition". I think that it is likely that this, more likely than any of the reconstructions made on the basis of the reports of Aristotle, represents the core of the "unwritten doctrine" of Plato. We might now dare to rephrase the Parmenidean insight as follows: all visible manifestations of Reality are misleading as to the essential nature of that Reality until these are marshalled to show their paradoxical nature; and likewise, by extension, the analytical tools of epistemology provide no important insights except at the extremes where paradoxes abound: the truly Real is only known at the point where the tools become useless.

15.6. If this interpretation of the significance of the Platonic corpus is correct, it is reasonable to ask the question: does it follow that the unwritten doctrine of Plato hold philosophical water beyond allowing the falsification of the Frazerian analysis? We might argue that it does not really matter, from the historical point of view at least, for, if Plato and the Platonists held it, we have achieved an important insight into the real cultural matrix of the Platonic corpus. In any case discussion of the detail and validity (or otherwise) of Plato's unwritten doctrines is not the subject of this essay: my purpose at this point is only to suggest that there *was* one, detectable in the dialogues, and that it was connected with a theory of Being.

15.7. We can dispute the validity of the default position concerning Reality in the Sophist: this is a matter of philosophical argument, and may always be so. But it is possible to deliver the *coup de grace* to any lingering notion that Plato understood himself to be working *towards* a theory of Being, rather than working within the context of a pre-existing ontology. In the *Laws*, Plato makes a statement which leaves no doubt that, for him, there exists an important connection between the ontology discussed in his dialogues, and the arts of some of those who practice forms of magic. At *Laws* XI, 933, he clearly distinguishes between two levels of magic, and the penalties for each:

...it is not easy to know the nature of all these things; nor if a man do know can he readily persuade others to believe him. And when men are disturbed in their minds at the sight of waxen images fixed either at their doors, or in a place where three ways meet, or upon the sepulchres of parents, there is no use trying to persuade them that they should despise all such things because they have no certain knowledge about them... he who attempts to... enchant others knows not what he is doing... unless he happens to be a prophet or diviner.

15.8. The penalties for the crime of witchcraft prescribed by Plato in the *Laws* are different in the case of the witch and the prophet or diviner, for the prophet *knows what he is doing*.*[115]. Plato here distinguishes quite distinctly the phenomenon of magic as association of ideas, as a problem of knowledge, and magic as hinging upon certain knowledge, as

dependent upon ontology. And his ontology is not dependent on any of the categories of our experience: it has no shape or form or substance: it cannot be "explained" as an enthusiastic error, as a failure to notice the distinction between a theory of knowledge and a theory of Being.

Section Sixteen

16.1. At least one species of magic is thus an art Plato associates with those who are capable of apprehending Reality. "Reality" he spoke of in his earlier works in terms of a metaphor: the 'Form of the Good', though by this of course he meant nothing which coheres in terms of a concrete image. The dialogues establish only that discursive intellectual tools do not allow us access to the essence of Reality, yet leave open the possibility of another technique, occasionally referred to, usually obliquely and with unexplained context, in some of the works. This appears to be part of Plato's unwritten doctrine, the *agrapha*. It is also clear from the detail of the dialogues, that there is a pre-existing theory of Being on which much of his work depends for its structure and purpose. Plato also distinguishes at least two species of magic: the first based on intellectual error, and the second on a certain knowledge. The former of these is of course the folly against which Frazer devoted his life energy; the latter species Frazer was quite unable to detect because his intellectual baggage made this impossible.

Summary of the Argument

Frazer excluded from the *Golden Bough* - without argument - all discussion of the relationship between magic and religion on the one hand, and theories of Being on the other. Both Magic and Religion are treated as phenomena explicable entirely in terms of the association of ideas. This essay explores the reasons for this, largely through his essay on *The Growth of Plato's Ideal Theory*, and examines whether or not the texts support his case.

In **Section One** we considered the question of whether or not there was a programme of research at the the Athenian Academy: there is no evidence for this - we know only that ontology and epistemology were discussed. We know that the theory of Ideas or Forms was eventually demolished in the *Sophist*, but this is not evidence that there was a programme of enquiry at the Academy.

Section Two explored Frazer's assertions that the "earliest philosophers were philosophers of Being", and that "reflection" began with Socrates. Frazer argued that both Socrates' and Plato's concern with epistemological matters in addition to questions about Being, distinguished them from the pre-Socratic philosophers, in that the new philosophical approach was subjective, concerned mainly with the apparatus of perception and judgement. Frazer's view is that Socrates investigated the faculty of generalization, whereas for Plato and Aristotle epistemic notions were converted into a theory of Being. This was Plato's "great error", since "induction is the road to knowledge, not Being".

Section Three questioned Frazer's characterization of Socrates as a pioneer of epistemology. Frazer himself was uncomfortable with it in the course of his 1879 essay, observing that epistemic notions (without predicates) are as barren as terms of Being. Socrates, he argues, sought universals in moral subjects, but in fact both Socrates and Plato used generalization as a tool. Both in fact, according to the Frazerian analysis, were dealing with notions rather than ascertainable truths.

Frazer's remarks on the significance of inductive reasoning in science are largely irrelevant because he is talking of practical knowledge, not the pursuit of general truths. Frazer's use of induction in science to explain the Socratic activity is based on a lack of clarity of how induction in science functions in practice. Frazer's engagement with the subjective idealism of Locke and Hume was explored, and it was observed that he was attempting to substitute a "public neutral reality" behind appearances for Plato's supersensible reality, in order to support his initial characterization of Socrates. Plato made a quite different set of judgements about the structure of the world. Frazer's use of Xenophon to support his characterization of Socrates was argued to be problematic.

Section Four looked briefly at the question of whether or not Socrates, Plato and Aristotle distinguished their epistemological and ontological structures. Aristotle's *Ethics* features an Anabasis of the soul; the*Timaeus* also features a similar hierarchy of Being based on moral action. Did the three men fail to distinguish the subjective and objective realms? Or are these worlds tied together together by some substrate? The Final Cause is suggested as the common substrate.

Section Five considered the Interchangeability of the Forms, which appears in the *Timaeus*. Discussion of the function of the dialogues as dialectical excursions from Plato's "assumptions"; the "starting points" in an ascent to the final principle of everything, using nothing in the sensible world, but only movement from "form to form". This practice seems to imply some mysterious inductive and acausal process, not fully discussed in the Platonic Corpus.

Section Six reviewed some of the other dialogues: their arguments do not lead to consistent epistemological conclusions. Taken together the dialogues support only the contention that knowledge is not attainable through sensibles, nor through the organs of sense.

Section Seven noted the introduction of Pythagorean elements into the *Timaeus*: if these were introduced after the collapse of the Ideal Theory, this eclectism might be some kind of evidence towards there being a programme of research at the Academy. The absence of any significant discussion of the divine in the Timaeus was also mentioned. More than once Plato stresses that the accounts of the creation contained in the *Timaeus* are mere likelihoods.

Section Eight is the first of the sections considering the *Parmenides*. It considers his well known view that the world of generation and passing-away does not participate in the world of Being. Consequently it is not at all possible to give a verbal account of Reality.

Section Nine introduced the difficulty of an "Idea of the Bad". Frazer's argument is that Plato converted a theory of knowledge into a theory of Being: that there is no Idea of the Bad suggests that this view is incorrect. Induction (epistemology) and generation (from Being) are contrasted - the

former moves from the particular to the universal, while the latter moves from the universal to the particular. Plato's "Form of the Good" is presumed on logical, not epistemological grounds. Frazer's objection to the "Form of the Good" is not a logical one, but a matter of belief: he prefers to see Plato's objective reality as the "public neutral reality" behind appearance noted before, which may be approached by induction and experiment. Plato is thus presented as the failed antecedent of the empirical tradition.

Section Ten: In the *Sophist* the Ideas are suddenly and unexpectedly presented as capable of participating in each other, and to be compounded of both Being and Not-Being. The material world appears to be distinguished from the world of Being by its causal relations, whereas in the world of the Ideas participation is an acausal process. The question of whether or not knowledge is an action is discussed in the*Sophist* - the problem it poses is as follows: is Reality altered by being known, and consequently subject to change, contrary to an earlier and axiomatic definition? The wider cultural context of the argument involved at this point is discussed - the point at which the argument in favour of the world of Ideas traditionally is brought to collapse. The conclusion adopted by the participants in the dialogue is a default position, which cannot be argued (i.e., it is a non-discursive apprehension) - Reality is both at once - it changes and is unchanging.

Section Eleven summarised Plato's view of the nature of the ultimate reality: it is always beyond understanding, unchanging, yet participates in the world of change - a paradoxical matrix. Is this a problem of epistemology? Is there no distinction between epistemology or ontology (since the world of change is what can be known)? Plato's ontology is shown to be beyond the mere projection of the categories of knowledge, since it is known at the point where the epistemology breaks down in contradictions. It is beyond all human categorisation. The Idea of the Good in the dialogues is simply part of the armoury of likelihoods employed by Plato - one of the assumed positions on the path to knowledge of Reality.

Section Twelve: Socrates (in Plato's words) is interpreted as holding this view of Reality (i.e., as a paradoxical matrix) beyond human

comprehension. Further suggestions are made as to the nature of the Platonic "agrapha", and it is observed that parallels between Platonic formulations and pre-Socratic fragments are possible.

Section Thirteen returned to a discussion of Frazer, and discussed his equation of the savage and the ancient, his programme of understanding the past in terms of an great intellectual error in the human apprehension of the world's processes. This error involves mistaking contiguity for connection, and confusing similarity with identity (his theory of sympathetic and contagious magic). This theory assumes an intellectual basis of an association of ideas, rather than a theory of Being as a substrate. Frazer's proposed order of cultural development is: magic/religion/science. Theories of Being are simply not mentioned in the Golden Bough. Frazer argues that underlying the system is a faith in the ordered uniformity of nature (the "public neutral reality" once again). Explicitly he states that the magician "supplicates no higher power". Likewise Frazer argues that Religion also is not traceable to a theory of Being, despite involving belief in higher powers. Instead, the higher powers are the personifications of natural forces. The universal absence of a basis in a theory of Being for both Magic and Religion is questioned here, and it is suggested that Frazer found it necessary to imply this because of his pre-existing equation of the savage and the ancient.

Section Fourteen: considered Frazer's exclusion of the *Parmenides* from his discussion in "The Growth of Plato's Ideal Theory": his behaviour here is very odd, for he argues almost simultaneously that its date is necessarily late, that its date is unimportant, that its arguments tell us little relevant to Plato's programme, and that he is not going to deal with the whole of it since he has not read it for some time. This despite the fact that it contains arguments fatal to the Ideal Theory, which would seem to make it essential material for discussion in his essay.

Section Fifteen: contemporary commentators recognised some of the fatal objections to the Ideal Theory in the *Parmenides*. The collapse of the possibility of discursive knowledge of the Real leaves the possibility of a non-discursive knowledge. This might suggest that the default position adopted by the speakers in the *Sophist* is in fact the goal of the whole

Platonic enterprise. Evidence that Plato understood himself to be working within an already given ontology is discussed (from the *Laws*).

Section Sixteen: It is suggested tha the non-discursive technique might be what is referred to obliquely in some of the dialogues, particularly in those passages which seem to imply knowledge beyond what is contained in the texts.

Conclusion

There is detectable and significant stratification in the intellectual life and apprehensions of the ancients, just as in our own world. It is all too easy to gloss over these stratifications and collapse a whole range of phenomena and opinions into a simple formula. I think it is clear not only that Frazer did this, but that his motives were at a much deeper and more philosophical level than hitherto suspected, largely by imposing an enormously crude stratification on the development of civilization, ironically drawn from Plato himself. The evidence to overturn this model is present in the texts.

Frazer's critical decisions about the role of Being in Magic and Religion were made early in his career. His argument about the Greek engagement with questions of Being depends on his characterization of the Academy as a research institution, dealing with questions essentially unconnected with the religious, ritual and cultural life of Athens, and the ancient world in general (because for Frazer the cultural life of the Athenians outside the Academy was scarcely disimilar from the life of savages). Plato's dialogues however make subtle reference to the cultural life of the Athenians in the course of the dialectical excursions, and thus suggest that a theory of Being underpins (to an extent we cannot yet determine) some aspects of their religious, magical and ritual existence.

We have the opportunity to re-evaluate materials which long since seemed to have been sucked dry of intelligible information. Concerning the higher reaches of Greek intellectual culture, we might begin by asking ourselves to what extent magical patterns of thought, belief, and action have to be

decoded by us in terms of implicit reference to a theory of Being, and at that, a theory which is not confined to a sequence of childish equations between concrete images and conceptions. Plato's ontology, epistemology, the practice of dialectic, etc, ought to be re-evaluated also, and should be allowed to function within their proper cultural context if we are to be equal to the new task before us, both historically and philosophically.

My own view is that the exclusive interpretation of magical practice and its patterns of belief as evidence of intellectual error, habitual though it has become in the study of antiquity, clearly depends too much on purely modern and unsubstantiated notions of how aspects of Greek culture fitted together; borne out at the cost of the misreading, the manipulation, and, on occasion, the surgical excision, of the evidence. It is clear I think that we continue to follow what is essentially a nineteenth century scholarly path (however modern it may look to us) at our peril, and that it it might repay our efforts to attend to a close and intelligent examination of the texts, setting aside as much as is possible of the baggage of the past one hundred and fifty years of scholarship. The cultural matrix of the Greeks is rich, and is always worth another look.

Selected Bibliography

Barnes, Jonathan Early Greek Philosophy, Harmondsworth, 1987

Burnet, John Early Greek Philosophy, London, 1945, [4th edn]

Bury, R.G. (trans.) Plato: Timaeus; Critias; Cleitophon; Menexenus; Epistles, Camb. Mass. & London, 1929

Campbell, Lewis The Sophistes and Politicus of Plato, Oxford,1867. [Text and Commentary]

Cherniss, Harold Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy, Baltimore, 1944

Cherniss, Harold Aristotle's Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy, Baltimore, 1935

Cherniss, Harold The Riddle of the Early Academy, Baltimore, 1945

Cioffi, Frank Wittgenstein on Freud and Frazer, CUP 1998

Cornford, F.M. Plato's Theory of Knowledge, London, 1935

Cornford, F.M. Plato's Cosmology, London, 1937

De Vogel, C.J. Rethinking Plato and Platonism, Leiden, 1986

Douglas, Mary "Judgements on James Frazer" in Daedalus, Fall 1978 issue [Vol. 107, no. 4, Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences] p151-164

Evelyn-White, H. G. (trans.) The Theogony in Hesiod; The Homeric Hymns & Homerica, London, 1914

Fowler, H. N. (trans.) Plato: Euthyphro; Apology; Crito; Phaedo; Phaedrus, Camb. Mass. & London,1970

Fowler, H. N. (trans.) Plato: Cratylus; Parmenides; Greater Hippias; Lesser Hippias, Camb. Mass. & London, 1970

Findlay, J. N. Plato and Platonism, New York, 1978

Frankfort, Henri, (Mr & Mrs); Jacobsen, Thorkhild; Wilson, John.A., Before Philosophy, Chicago, 1946 [original title: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man]

Frazer, J.G. The Growth of Plato's Ideal Theory, London, 1930

Frazer, J.G. The Golden Bough, London, 1922 [abridged edition]

Guthrie, W.K.C. A History of Greek Philosophy:

vol. I. The Earlier Presocratics and the Pythagoreans, CUP 1962;

Guthrie, W.K.C. vol. II. The Presocratic tradition from Parmenides to Democritus, CUP 1965

Herodotus The Histories, London, 1877, [trans. H. Cary]

Hicks, R. D. Diogenes Laertius: Lives of Eminent Philosophers, 2vols., London, 1938 [revised edn.]

Hume, David A Treatise on Human Nature, Oxford, 1888 [Selby-Bigge edn.]

Jowett, Benjamin The Dialogues of Plato, translated into English, 5 vols. Oxford, 1892 [3rd edn.]

Jowett, B. & Campbell, L. Plato's Republic, vol. 1 [Greek Text], Oxford, 1894

Locke, John An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, London & Glasgow, 1960 [edited by A.D. Woolzey]

Lutoslawski, W. The Origin and Growth of Plato's Logic, London, 1905

Miller, M. H. Plato's Parmenides: the Conversion of the Soul, Princeton, 1986

Olmstead, A.T. A History of the Persian Empire, Chicago, 1949

Onians, R.B. The Origins of European Thought, Cambridge, 1942

Peters, F.H. (trans.) The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle, London, 1898

Russell, Bertrand Problems of Philosophy, Oxford, 1912

Ryle, Gilbert The Concept of Mind, Harmondsworth, 1949

Stevenson, J.G. "Aristotle as a Historian of Philosophy", in the Journal of Hellenic Studies, vol. 94, 1974

Sayre, K. M. Plato's Late Ontology: a Riddle Resolved, Princeton, 1983

Thompson, D'Arcy W. "On Bird and Beast in Ancient Symbolism", Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, vol. 38, 1894, pp179-92

Tredennick, H. (trans.) Aristotle: Metaphysics, Camb. Mass., 1933

Xenophon Memorabilia [In Xenophon's Anabasis, or Expedition of Cyrus, and the Memorabilia of Socrates, trans. Rev. J.S. Watson, London, 1891]; also Memorabilia, Bk. 1, edited by B.J. Hayes, London, n.d.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig "Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough", from Synthese, 17, 1967, trans A.C. Miles and Rush Rees.(see Douglas). This text was republished in Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives, ed. C.G. Luckhardt, Harvester Press, 1979.

Notes

[1] Wittgenstein notes in reference to an item on page 179 of the 1922 two volume edition that: "How much more truth there is in this view, which ascribes the same multiplicity to the soul as to the body, than in a modern watered-down theory. Frazer doesn't notice that we have before us the teaching of Plato and Schopenhauer". "Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough"* in:*Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives*, ed. C. G. Luckhardt, Harvester Press, 1979.

[2] W. Lutoslawski, *Origins and Growth of Plato's Logic*. For a criticism of Lutoslawski's stylometry see *Plato's Late Ontology*, by K. M. Sayre, 1983, Appendix B, pp256-7

[3] H. Cherniss, *The Riddle of the Early Academy*, 1945

[4] Aristotle *Metaph* 990b

Ἔτι δὲ καὶ καθ' οὓς τροπους δεικνυμεν ὅτι εντι᾽έστι τὰ εἴδη, καὶ οὐθενα φαινεται τούτων· ἐξ ἑνίων μεν γὰρ οὐκ ἀνάνγη γίγνεσθαι συλλογισμόν, ἐξ ἑνίων δὲ καὶ οὐχ ὧν οἰόμεθα τούτων εἴδη γίγνεται.

[5] *Sophist* 256e for example, in connection with motion; *Soph*. 249b-d; see also the *Parmenides* 133b-134c

[6] Jowett, in his introduction to the *Parmenides* argues

that the Platonic Ideas were in constant process of growth and transmutation; sometimes veiled in poetry and mythology, then again emerging as fixed Ideas, in some passages regarded as absolute and eternal, and in others as relative to the human mind, existing in and derived from external objects as well as transcending them... Their transcendental existence is not asserted, and is therefore implicitly denied in the *Philebus*: different forms are ascribed to them in the *Republic*, and they are mentioned in the *Theaetetus*, the *Sophist*, the *Politicus*, and the *Laws*, much as universals would be spoken of in modern books... the perplexities which surround the one and many in the sphere of the Ideas are... attended to in the *Philebus*, and no answer is given to them... To

suppose that Plato, at a later period of his life, reached a point of view from which he was able to answer them, is a groundless assumption.

-Benjamin Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. IV, p6-7

[7] It is no part of the purpose of my essay to attempt to alter the established relative chronology of the dialogues, for the simple reason - which I hope to show - that the chronology of their composition is irrelevant to their interpretation

[8] *TGPIT*, p1

[9] *TGPIT*, p2

[10] *TGPIT*, p3

[11] *TGPIT*, p5

[12] *TGPIT*, p6. Frazer illustrates the difference between the Platonic Socrates and the more probable historical Socrates by drawing upon the accounts in Xenophon and Aristotle (the *Memorabilia* of the former, and the *Metaphysics* and the *Parts of Animals* of the latter).

[13] See for example, the *Republic*, 509d-510b. In discussing the analogy of the divided line, Socrates speaks of two powers (the form of the Good and the Sun), one of which "is supreme over everything in the intelligible order or region, the other over everything in the visible region". One subsection of the Line represents shadows and reflections in water and polished surfaces (the visible); the other represents "the objects which are the originals of the images - the animals around us, and every kind of plant and manufactured object".

[14] *TGPIT* p8.

[15] *TGPIT* p8.

[16] *TGPIT* p9-10.

[17] *TGPIT* p10

[18] *Metaph*. 1.c 6, s2

[19] *TGPIT* p11

[20] One might attempt to support this view by referring to the *Phaedrus* where the theory of the Forms appears, but there the Ideas are of Justice, Temperance, Knowledge (247d) and Justice, Temperance, and Beauty (250b) : "no ideas of material substances are hinted at" (see *TGPIT* p48). But for Plato material substance was far removed from the Real and thus remote from the realm of ontology. And so, even if the theory of the Forms grew out of an ontology, it would still have dealt first with abstractions (such as justice, temperance, beauty, etc.)

[21] Xenophon, *Memorabilia* Bk. IV Ch. 2. 24-30

[22] *TGPIT* p3

[23] *TGPIT* p3

[24] *TGPIT* p5. Frazer cites Aristotle for Socrates' pattern of interests: In his sketch of the history he tells us that Socrates, neglecting cosmology, sought to discover universals in moral questions, and gave his attention to definitions *Met*. 987 b1-4. Again *Met*. 1078 b17 sqq. he says that while definitions of physical things had been attempted to a small extent by previous philosophers as Democritus and the Pythagoreans, Socrates was the first who in the sphere of ethics sought for universal definitions: but previous attempts at definition had been very imperfect.

[25] *TGPIT* p6

[26] *TGPIT* p6

[27] *TGPIT* p7.

[28] *TGPIT* p7.

[29] *TGPIT* p7.

[30] *TGPIT* p8

[31] Frazer quotes this work in his essay (p67), in connection with the uselessness of final causes in science.

[32] *TGPIT* p7

[33] *see* Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, ch.VII: where the question of whether or not new knowledge is ever gained by means of deduction is

discussed. He concludes that "we can now see that in certain cases, at least, it does so"

[34] Bertrand Russell, *Problems of Philosophy* ch.II "The existence of matter":

One great reason why it is felt that we must secure a physical object in addition to the sense-data, is that we want the same object for different people. ...If there are to be public neutral objects... there must be something over and above the private and particular sense-data which appear to various people.

[35] Even now, though physicists are accustomed to dealing with fundamental particles whose nature is elusive in the extreme, the assumption is still present that law is still being obeyed, though it might be approachable only through statistical analysis and field theory.

[36] Yet despite Xenophon's characterization of Socrates as mainly concerned with ethical matters, a more Platonic Socrates occasionally emerges in the *Memorabilia*. Thus Bk. IV Ch. 3.13:

... you do not expect to see the bodily forms of the gods, but will be content, as you behold their works, to worship and honour them. Reflect too, that the gods themselves give us this intimation that we must not expect, when we consult the gods, to see their shapes; for the other deities i.e., the lesser gods that give us blessings, do not bestow any of them by coming manifestly before our sight; and he that orders and holds together the whole universe, in which are all things beautiful and good, and who preserves it always unimpaired, undisordered, and undecaying... is himself manifested only in the performance of his mighty works, but is invisible to us while he regulates them.

The next section reminds us of the Myth of the Cave in the *Republic*: Consider also that the sun, which appears manifest to all, does not allow men, to contemplate him too curiously, but, if anyone tries to gaze on him steadfastly, deprives him of his sight." Xenophon also reports that Socrates said: "The soul of man, moreover, which partakes of the divine nature if anything else in man does, rules, it is evident, within us, but is itself unseen (cf. *Rep*. 514sqq.).

[37] interestingly, in defining the action of the gods as passive contemplation, Aristotle reproduces the extreme Parmenidean form of Plato's Ideal theory, in which the Form of the Good is unchanging and unchangeable. In Bk. X of the *Ethics* Aristotle characterizes the activity of the divine as contemplation. The gods are living beings from whom all forms of activity have been removed. "...if a being lives, and action cannot be ascribed to him,... what remains but contemplation? It follows, then, that the divine life, which surpasses all others in blessedness, consists of contemplation". (*Nic. Eth*. X. 8. 7., F. H. Peters trans.)

[38] *Tim*. 42a-c

[39] Plato Tim 31 b-c

δύο δὲ μόνω καλῶς ξυνίστασθαι τρίτου χωρὶς οὐ δυνατόν· δεσμὸν γὰρ ἐν μέσῳ δεῖ τινὰ ἀμφοιν ξυναγωγὸν γίγνεσθαι. δεσμῶν δὲ κάλλιστος ὃς ἂν αὑτὸν καὶ τὰ ξυνδουμενα ὁ τι μάλιστα ἓν ποιῇ. τοῦτο δὲ πέφυκεν ἀναλογία κάλλιστα ἀποτελεῖν·

[40] Plato Tim 31c-32a

ὁπόταν γὰρ ἀριθμῶν τριῶν εἴτε ὄγκων εἴτε δυνάμεων ὠντινωνοὖν ᾖ τὸ μέσον, ὁ τί περ τὸ πρῶτον πρὸς αὐτό, τοῦτο αὐτὸ πρὸς τὸ ἔσχατον, καὶ πάλιν αὖθις ὅ τι τὸ ἔσχατον πρὸς τὸ μέσον, τοῦτο τὸ μεσον πρὸς τὸ πτῶτον τότε τὸ μεσον μεν πρῶτον και ἔσχατον γιγνόμενον, τὸ δὲ ἔσχατον καὶ τὸ πρῶτον αὖ μέσα ἀμφότερα, πάνθ' οὕτως ἐξ ἀναγκης τὰ αὐτὰ εἶναι ξυμβήσεται, τὰ αὐτὰ δὲ γενόμενα ἀλλήλοις ἓν πάντα ἔσται.

[41] *Rep*. 511b-c

[42] *TGPIT* p27: Frazer chooses to translate *aute he psuke* as "pure reason" to highlight the supposed anticipation of Kant.

[43] Accordingly beauty is important in awakening the soul to the reality of the world of the Forms through recollection.

[44] *Rep*. 592b; 499a.

[45] *Tim* 28c

[46] Jonathan Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, "Parmenides", p135 (Frag. 8.38), drawn from Simplicius, *Commentary on the Physics* 144.25-146.27

[47] W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol.II, p50 Frag. 8.50.

[48] W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol.II, p34. Frag. 8.29

[49] *TGPIT* p50

[50] E. Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen*, p273, English trans.

[51] The passage in question though it appears to imply the existence of the Idea of Injustice possibly does so by virtue of a non-technical use of *eidos* (476a).

[52] *Rep*. 479e

[53] 476b

[54] *TGPIT* p50

[55] *TGPIT* p51

[56] That resemblance itself is the most important aspect of the Good is illustrated by *Tim* 31b-c (already quoted) where "the fairest of bonds" is described as that which "most perfectly unites into one both itself and the things which it binds together", Thus not only does the image of the Good resemble the Good itself, but stands in relation to the Good in a way which likewise resembles it.

[57] F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, p221.

[58] Frag. 8.43

[59] 244d-e.

[60] 245a

[61] 245c

[62] 245d

[63] 245e

[64] Plato Soph. 248c:

ἱκανὸν ἔθεμεν ὅρον που των ὄντων, ὅταν τῳ παρῇ ἢ δρᾷν καὶ πρὸς τὸ σμικρότατον δύναμις;

[65] Plato Soph. 248c:

[πρὸς δὴ ταῦτα τόδε λέγουσιν,] ὅτι γενέσει μεν μέτεστι τοῦ πάσχειν καὶ τοιεῖν δυνάμεως, πρὸς δε οὐσίαν τούτων οὐδετέρου τὴν δύναμιν ἁρμόττειν φασίν.

[66] Plato Soph. 248d:

[τί δέ;] τὸ γιγνωσκειν ἢ τὸ γιγνωσκεσται φατὲ ποίημα ἢ πάθος ἢ αμφότερον; ἢ τὸ μεν πάθεμα, τὸ δὲ θάτερον; ἢ παντάπασιν οὐδετερον οὐδετὲρου τούτων μεταλαμβάνειν; δῆλον ὡς οὐδέτερον οὐδετερου· τἀναντία γὰρ ἂν τοῖς ἔμποσθεν λέγοιεν.

[67] There is a minor textual problem concerning the identity of the speaker at this point in the dialogue which does not affect the sense of the argument - see L. Campbell, *Sophistes*, p128

[68] Plato Soph. 248d-e:

..ὡς τὸ γιγνώσκειν εἴπερ ἔσται ποιεῖν τι, τὸ γιγνωσκόμενον ἀναφκαῖον αὖ ξυμβαίνει πάσχειν. τὴν οὐσίαν δὲ κατὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦτον γιγνώσκομένην ὑπὸ τῆς γνωσεως, καθ ὅσον γιγνώσδεται, κατὰ τοσοῦτον κινεῖσθαι διὰ τὸ πάσχειν, ὃ δή φαμεν οὐδ ἂν γενέσθαι περὶ το ἠρεμοῦν.

[69] [Soph. 248e-249a]

τί δὲ πρὸς Διός; ὡς αληθῶς κίνησιν καὶ ζωὴν καὶ ψυκὴν καὶ φρονησιν ἢ ῥᾳδίως πεισθησόμεθα τῷ παντελῶς ὄντι μὴ παρεῖναι, μηδὲ ζῆν αὐτὸ μηδὲ φρονεῖν, ἀλλὰ, σεμνὸν καὶ ἅγιον, νοῦν οὐκ ἔχον, ἀκινητον ἑστὸς εἶναι;

[70] We are not generally accustomed to imagine that belief is something for which arguments can be supplied, though our own religious history provides numerous examples of the use of philosophy to supply these.

[71] note also frag. 26.1 of Xenophanes (Guthrie, op. cit., vol. II, p37. & n2.) Guthrie comments on this earlier example, where Parmenides "deliberately called up in our minds the image of Xenophanes' pantheistic god, who 'always remains in the same place, not moving at all' (in connection with Parmenides frag. 8.29sqq., quoted earlier)

[72] 249a

[73] 249a

[74] 249b

[75] 249c-d

[76] *Tim* 52b

[77] 247c

[78] ἀσχηματιστος

[79] 247c-d

[80] *TGPIT* p69

[81] The Pythagorean elements in the *Timaeus* involve ideal shapes which occupy the realm of no shape, of no place, and implicitly no dimension. To what extent therefore do these Forms have reality? It is difficult to imagine that Plato is happily passing backwards to a Pythagoreanism which does not address this question.

[82] *Tim*. 52a

[83] That the divine was understood to be beyond comprehension at least as early as the 6th century we have only to look at the reply of the oracle at Delphi to Croesus as to whether or not he should make war against the Persians (Hdt. Bk. 1.49): "I know the number of the sands, and the measure of the sea; I understand the dumb, and hear him that does not speak..." These things are impossible, and are concrete images of the impossible. The gods have powers beyond our capacity to understand, to the point where they transcend the categories of knowing. The corollary of this is that the being of the gods is likewise beyond all mortal definition

[84] *Tim* 28c

[85] see *Phaedrus* 275c-d, where Socrates says: "He who thinks... anything in writing will be clear and certain, would be a utterly simple person... if he thinks written words are of any use except to remind him who knows the matter about which they are written". And at 277e-278b: "...in the written word there is necessarily much that is playful, and... no written discourse deserves to be treated very seriously... the best of them really serve only to remind us of what we know...."

[86] "And how could he, who trusted the Gods, think that there were no gods?" *Memorabilia* Bk 1 ch.1.5

[87] compare for example lines 116-128 of Hesiod's *Theogony*.

[88] *Tim* 30a

[89] *Golden Bough*, ch. XXIII, pp345-8, 1922, abridged edn.)

[90] pp. 347-8

[91] pp. 345-346

[92] pp346-7

[93] *Golden Bough*, ch. LXIX. This sequence has long since been consigned to the scrapheap. However, the concept of magic as a phenomenon entirely explicable in terms of the association of ideas remains, more or less unchallenged.

[94] p346

[95] D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, "On Bird and Beast in Ancient Symbolism", *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, vol. 38, 1894, pp179-92

[96] *Golden Bough*, Ch. III "Sympathetic Magic" p14

[97] *Golden Bough*, Ch. IV "Magic and Religion", p64

[98] p66

[99] *Golden Bough*, Ch. IV, "Magic and Religion", pp74-77

[100] *Tim*. 31b-32a

[101] *Golden Bough*, Ch. IV, "Magic and Religion", p73

[102] p73

[103] *TGPIT* p20

[104] *TGPIT* p22

[105] This is in fact inaccurate: deductions from the proposition "the One is not" are also covered.

[106] *TGPIT* p89

[107] *TGPIT* p89

[108] *Plato* vol. IV, trans. H.N. Fowler, London and Harvard 1920, p196-7.

[109] B. Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. IV, p5-6

[110] op. cit. p6-7; see section 1 of this essay

[111] M. H. Miller, *Plato's Parmenides: the Conversion of the Soul*, Princeton, 1986, "Epilogue", p181

[112] op. cit. p182-3; compare for example Husserl's concept of Transcendental Intersubjectivity, *Cartesian Meditations*; compare also *Tim*. 31b-32a

[113] op. cit. p183

[114] J.N. Findlay, *Plato and Platonism*, 1978, p232

[115] trans. Jowett, *Dial. Plat*. vol. V. p322-3